THE ARISTOCRAT OF SCIENCE FICTION

AMAZING STORIES

ANC

SEPTEMBER

25¢



By E. K. JARVIS

"YOU CAN'T ESCAPE FROM MARS!"



Ruthless vengeance — hate — love and raw passion . . . these emotions ruled the men and women who braved the open ranges of the great American West.

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The OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

BY AND large, as the saying goes, the task of putting together a national magazine is a fairly enjoyable one. Certainly it's the perfect pastime for the born second guesser: he changes story titles, uses a blue pencil to butcher the authors' beautiful prose, selects scenes for the artists to illustrate, and takes two hours for lunch. And when he's not engaged in such highly difficult pursuits, you'll find him leaning back in his oversize swivel chair behind his glass-topped mahogany desk giving ponderous advice to some struggling young author—advice that almost invariably sends said struggling young author out to seek a career as shipping clerk.

BUT COMES the day each month when that editor is forced to sit down and do some writing himself: one hundred and ten (count 'em!) lines of copy to fill this page. Believe us, he'd rather not! It's so much easier to tell other people how to write, so much more fun to second-guess the efforts of others. Consequently he puts off until the very last moment the job that he knows must be done...and done by him alone.

PREPARATION for this staggering project follows a well-defined course. First, the editor must go through the ceremony known as "clearing off his desk." Letters already answered and ready for filing must be read through again—"in case I missed something." Then the pile of manuscripts on the left side of the desk must be moved over to the right side... and the one already on the right must be moved over to the left. (See how difficult this is?) This done, the top of the desk needs dusting. Obviously this requires the skill of a highly trained executive. Now comes the task of sharpening every pencil in, on, and near the desk. (The fact that the editor's secretary sharpened all of them fifteen minutes before has nothing to do with it and we're surprised that you brought it up. And a little hurt, if you don't mind our saying so.)

NOW WE'RE all set to do this month's column. The typewriter gets moved into place, a stack of paper is within easy reach and the first sheet is turned into the machine. Wait a minute! The ink on that ribbon looks pretty faint; better change it. Naturally the editor will have to do the changing; he can handle the job in half an hour, but his secretary would need all of three or four minutes to get it done.

FINGERS are now poised above the keys. Here we go! Hey, wait a minute! What're we going to write about? Let's see now.... Business of leaning back and lighting a cigarette and putting a leg across the corner of the desk. That last move gives anyone coming into the office a view of the hole in the editor's shoe....

TIME PASSES.... The sheet of paper in the typewriter is as pure and untouched as Dracula's maiden aunt. What to say? How about a nice juicy crusade of some kind? You know—like what's wrong with Hollywood, or the reprint peril, or what does an editor have to do to get better stories? But we've already covered those subjects—and meant every word, too!

MORE TIME passes.... How about a nice chatty column on the wonderful stories we're running this month? Naw, that's a lazy way out—and besides, the stories will speak for themselves.... We could mention the NORWESCON—the World Science-Fiction Convention to be held in Portland, Oregon, over Labor Day this year. As a matter of fact, we're going to be there—and it's our hope that we'll have the opportunity of talking things over with as many fans, agents and authors as possible.

BUT THIS isn't getting the month's *Observatory* written. Maybe we could give our readers a few hints on the stories and articles we've lined up for the *new* AMAZING. But then again, that subject was pretty well covered last month and we don't want to get into a rut.

TIME OUT for a couple aspirins.... That sheet of paper, so white and unblemished, is getting on our nerves. Tell you what: we'll go down and have a cup of coffee. Then, when we get back, we'll sit down and knock out this column in five minutes. Okay?

—HB

AMAZING STORIES

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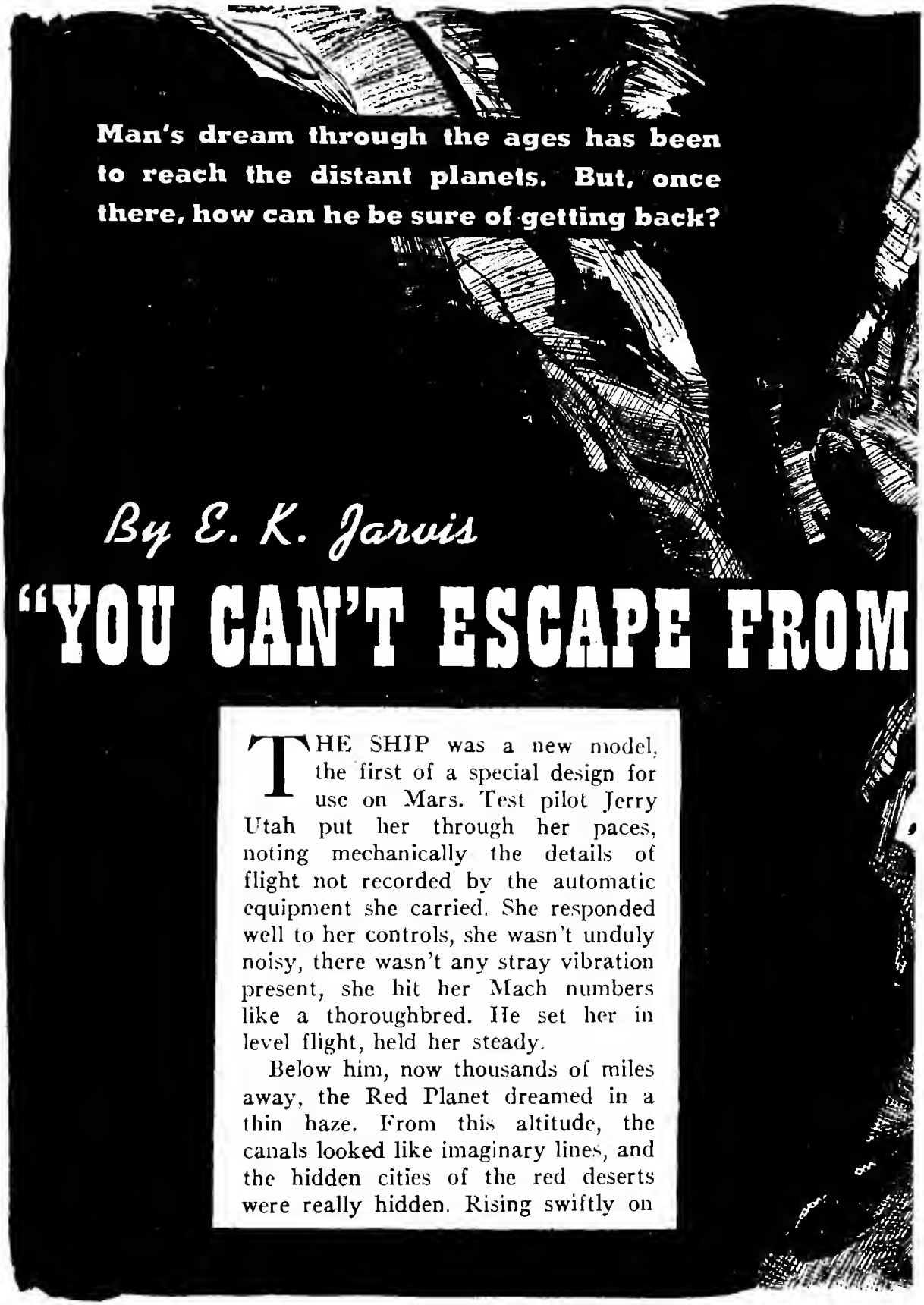
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Man's dream through the ages has been to reach the distant planets. But, once there, how can he be sure of getting back?

By E. K. Jarvis

"YOU CAN'T ESCAPE FROM

THE SHIP was a new model, the first of a special design for use on Mars. Test pilot Jerry Utah put her through her paces, noting mechanically the details of flight not recorded by the automatic equipment she carried. She responded well to her controls, she wasn't unduly noisy, there wasn't any stray vibration present, she hit her Mach numbers like a thoroughbred. He set her in level flight, held her steady.

Below him, now thousands of miles away, the Red Planet dreamed in a thin haze. From this altitude, the canals looked like imaginary lines, and the hidden cities of the red deserts were really hidden. Rising swiftly on



He caught them completely by surprise, jumping from the rock wall above them.

the horizon was Phobos, the inner moon of Mars. Since one of the requirements of this ship was that she should be able to reach the moons of Mars easily, he set her nose straight toward Phobos.

Phobos—the name had been selected on Earth, in 1877, when the satellite had been first discovered. Phobos was a root word meaning fear... He wondered why such a name had been selected for this fierce little companion of Mars? What had been in the mind of the astronomer who had picked this name?

Of all the words available to him, he had certainly selected the right one as a name for this moon.

Phobos—Forbidden World.

When the first humans arrived on Mars in 2021—a dare-devil crew of death-cheaters lead by old Trask Filler—they had discovered that the Martians had already achieved space flight to their satellites. This was as far as the Martians had gone, either they had lost interest in the worlds up in the sky when they got this far or they had not been able to muster the courage to jump off into the emptiness of space itself. But they had reached their moons.

So much the humans learned soon after they landed. In the two score years that had passed since that date, the human had learned little more about the moons of Mars, or even about the Martians themselves. The Martians had declared Phobos off-limits to all humans. What was hidden on this little satellite no man knew. The Martians themselves seemed to regard the little moon with a mixture of superstitious awe and dread in which fear was the biggest emotion.

Jerry Utah watched Phobos enlarge rapidly in the plastic glass of the control cabin.

Then, as though it had been wiped clean, the image of the moon vanished from his eyes.

The vision of a woman replaced it.

And what a woman! Full-breasted and red-lipped, with dark hair tumbling down across her shoulders. A clinging dress in the Martian style revealed rather than concealed the loveliness of a lithe body. More startling than anything else was the fact that she was human.

There was no human woman like this on all Mars. Jerry Utah, who had a connoisseur's taste in such matters, was willing to bet that no such woman existed on the Red Planet. If she had existed here, her name would be a legend among the women-hungry men who crossed space to reach this outpost of desolation in the sky. For a split second, so swiftly did the vision come, he had the impression that the woman in the glass was real. He could see her eyes looking at him, the startled lights in them, and he had the impression that she could see him. Her lips moved to form words.

He shook his head and closed his eyes, to dispel the vision. "Utah, have you gone space happy?" Sometimes men crossing space thought they saw things outside the ports of their ships that could not exist there. His first dazed impression was that he was a victim of such an hallucination.

But when he opened his eyes, the woman in the glass was still there.

Panic caught him. The vision ought not to be there. It was actually in his mind, not in the plastic, it had to be in his mind, there was no other place it could be.

"Utah, you fool!" He doubled up his fist, smacked himself full in the mouth, a backhanded blow that brought sharp pain with it and left the taste of blood on his lips. That ought to dispel the vision.

But—the vision remained.

SIMULTANEOUSLY somewhere in the control cabin of the ship a bell rang sharply—the radar warning system going into operation. For once in his life Jerry Utah—failed to hear the sharp clang of that tiny bell. His attention was concentrated on the vision.

Was this vision real? Could it be real? If it was real, how was he seeing it? He knew from time to time that very strange results had been reported in radio reception, fences had been reported as talking, iron deer on laws, even the fillings in the teeth, all these had occasionally acted as impromptu radio receivers, startling the hearers by detecting a radio program when no receiver seemed to be present. Was this vision he was seeing actually some telecast program that was being reproduced by the thick plastic of the view port?

It could be, maybe! No one had ever reported such a thing but perhaps it could happen. If this wasn't happening, had his mind gone bad on him? Had he begun to see things that didn't exist?

The woman seemed to see him, something no telecast vision could do. She looked up at him, then past him. He saw fright in her eyes. Her lips moved, screaming words. Dimly he seemed to hear them.

"Look—out!"

For the first time he heard the clangor of the bell. He jerked his eyes to the radar screen. There, clearly visible, was the red warning signal. He lifted his gaze to the vision port.

The picture of the woman was gone from it. The plastic was undistorted. As the vision had come, so it had gone. Instead of the woman, he saw in the plastic—the jagged rocky surface of the Forbidden Moon, dead ahead of him.

It was this moon the radar screen had detected.

The ship he was flying was a jet job designed for operation either in or out of an atmosphere. He was travelling at a rate several times the speed of sound—the Mach counter stood above the three mark—indicated he was travelling more than three times the speed of sound at sea level. He jerked the controls to turn the ship, to dodge the grim rocky mass rising up so fast in front of him it seemed to be materializing there. The ship responded. G's hit him a mighty blow.

The ship had been soundly designed. It would take a sharp turn and emerge unharmed. But the human body wouldn't, even in the protection of a G suit, it wouldn't take the pressure. Even as he twisted the controls, he knew too many G's were going to hit him.

He tried to soften the turn, fighting desperately to get the ship under control and to keep himself from blacking out. He had the dazed impression that he was a child again, playing pop-the-whip, and that he was on the end of a long, long whip—as the popper. The G's seemed to reach into his body and crush his substance molecule by molecule, missing no single atom.

He knew he was going to black out. He fought against it, knew it was a fight he couldn't win. If he turned the ship swiftly enough to dodge Phobos, the pressure of the turn would make him black out. If he didn't turn it, he would crash.

As the blackness hit him, he kicked off the power.

The little ship hit with a thundering roar. The ejection controls, designed to release the pressure cabin took hold. The whole cabin was ejected just before the ship itself hit. Jerry

Utah went with the cabin.

Flung clear of the ship, the cabin was tossed upward in a mighty arc, from which it came floating down. It struck the side of a hill, bounced, struck again, and slid to a halt at the bottom.

JERRY UTAH did not know how he got out of the cabin. He was dazed, shocked, and blundering unconsciously, like a swimmer trying to swim to shore but not knowing quite how to do the job. Then, little by little he began to get impressions of the scene around him. Some things were right, other things were wrong.

The air was wrong. Not that there was anything wrong with the air itself—it was sweet, breathable, and maybe a little heavier than the air on Mars itself—but the fact that it existed at all was wrong.

He was on Phobos, he had crashed here. Even in his dazed state, he knew this much. But on a solar body the size of this tiny moon all of the molecules of that mixture of gases that is called air should have escaped into space ages in the past. Even Earth's moon was airless, or practically so. Phobos should have no air at all.

But it had air. He was breathing. This one fact proved there was air on the moon. Also, he could hear sharp crackling sounds mixed with a steady roar and a blast of heat, all of which were coming from the burning fuel tanks of the flier and all of which added still further proof of the existence of air.

The heat was becoming uncomfortable. It was a pressure urging him to move. But moving would require effort and it was so nice just to lie where he was and exist without being really conscious. If he moved he would become conscious and if he became conscious, he would hurt, a chain of circumstances that was all too clear to him. Therefore, don't move. Just lie still. To hell with the heat. The hell with—

He was aware of scrambling sounds near him. A voice called sharply to him.

He ignored it. The hell with it too. It wanted him to move. He wanted to lie still. It was so nice and restful here.

Something or somebody grabbed him, lifted him, began to half carry, half drag him. He tried to cry out in protest as this unwarranted intrusion of his right to rest but his complaint went unheeded.

Later he was allowed to lie down and the something or the somebody who had carried him away tried to make him comfortable. Quite a lot later, he opened his eyes.

He hastily closed them again.

The vision was back.

"Go 'way, witch!" He waved a feeble hand.

The vision didn't go away. It started to talk. "I'm so glad you are not dead. Please don't close your eyes. It was all my fault. I'm sorry but I didn't mean to do it."

Amazed, he listened to the voice. The words were English.

An exclamation of disgust followed. Then the voice came again. It was speaking Martian now, the language of the red deserts, at a mile-a-minute clip. Utah listened with languid interest. Ordinary Martian he could understand, if it was spoken slowly enough and he was given plenty of time between words, but this was moving much too fast for him. As best he could gather, she was apologizing for using something that she called the *uni projection,* whatever this was.

He didn't pay much attention. He was convinced this was a dream, a distorted fiction of the mind created

as the brain itself was destroyed. "I'm dead," he told himself. "I died when this ship crashed. Now I'm hearing voices and seeing visions."

THIS WAS A rational, sensible explanation and he could think of no other. True, it seemed to last a long time, but he knew enough psychology to know that the brain could not be trusted to measure time accurately, it made instants into hours or hours into moments, depending on the focus of its attention. No, he was dead.

He opened his eyes again.

The vision was still there.

It didn't look like a figment of the imagination, a dream-inspired hallucination. It looked like a real woman. She was kneeling beside him. She had torn off a part of her skirt and was using it to wipe something from his face—blood, he thought. He reached out a tentative hand and touched her.

She was startled by the gesture. She drew hastily away from him like a child frightened by a sudden movement. Then, as if she sensed the uncertainty and bewilderment in him, as if she realized he was a drowning man grasping at straws, she moved close again—and allowed him to touch her. His fingers found firm flesh, warm, living flesh.

"You—you're real," he whispered. Sometimes dreams turned into reality. This one had. There was awe in him. He had seen this woman in a vision and because of the distraction of that vision, his ship had crashed. He should have died in that crash. But he hadn't. Now the woman of his vision was here with him, real, alive.

Who was she? What was she doing here on this rocky, forbidden moon of Mars? How did it happen there was enough air here to sustain life? Questions tumbled through his mind like mad acrobats drunk with marijuana.

"Yes. I am real. As real as you are."

"Who—who are you?"

"My name is Nerissa."

"Nerissa." He said the word as if he still did not quite believe all this could be true. "Nerissa what?"

She shook her head. "Just Nerissa. I do not have any more names. Should I have?"

"People usually do," he said. "Like me. I'm Jerry Utah."

"Jer-ry U-tah." The words came to her tongue with difficulty. She spoke a swift sentence in Martian which he did not understand.

"I was forty to fifty miles away from this rock pile when I saw you," he said. Defiance sounded in his voice as if he dared her to explain how this could have happened.

"Yes, yes," she answered. "I saw your ship and I used the *uni projection—*"

"The what?" he said.

"It is a trick of the priests here. I have learned it from them. By using it, you can make yourself be seen at a great distance. You can also see what is happening far away. I do not understand how it is explained—"

"I don't either," he answered, whistling. He knew the Martians were far ahead of earth scientists in developing some of the more obscure functions of the mind. Perhaps this *uni projection* which she said she had used was some development of ESP powers.

"How does it happen there is air on this place?" he continued.

"Why is air here? Because we need it to breathe," Nerissa answered.

"But what keeps it from flying away?" He tried to explain what he wanted to know.

"Oh, I see," she said at last. "The

priests here have some kind of a machine that creates gravity. It is this machine that holds the air here."

HE NODDED. The explanation he understood but he did not understand the whys and the wherefores of the matter any better than he understood the operation of the *uni projection*. But he saw one thing quite clearly—both the *uni projection* and the machine for creating artificial gravity meant that here on this rocky moon science had taken tremendous strides indeed.

On Mars itself they knew nothing of the *uni projection*. Nor did they know anything about artificial gravity. Martian scientific development seemed to have stumbled badly on the main planet.

But it hadn't stumbled here on this moon. Instead, it had gone forward with tremendous speed.

"How did you get here, Nerissa?" Utah said.

Her expression was troubled. "I do not know, for sure. I was brought here when I was a little girl."

"From Mars?"

"Yes, I think."

"Who brought you here?"

"The priests, I guess." A tiny tremor passed over her face when she used the word *priests*. He saw it, wondered about it. Was she afraid of the priests. Were they the rulers here? What was hidden here on this forbidden moon? Again the questions were tumbling in his mind like mad acrobats. Well, he would get them answered, he supposed, in time. He was alive and not badly hurt. What else mattered? At a sound the girl rose quickly to her feet. For a moment she seemed to search for the source of the noise that had disturbed her.

"The priests come!" she said quickly.

Utah caught a glimpse of a long file of blue-clad figures moving toward the flaming wreckage of the ship. Blue was a sacred color on Mars, a color restricted exclusively to the priesthood. "Let 'em come," he said.

"But they will kill you!" she spoke.

"Kill me?" he gasped. "In heaven's name—why?"

"Because you landed here. This is a forbidden moon."

"But I didn't land here on purpose. It was an accident."

"That will make no difference—to them." A shudder crossed her face. "But I couldn't help it."

"You have broken one of their laws, whether or not you intended to break the law is of no importance. Jerry, there is only one way I know to save you."

"What is that?"

"Tell them that you have come here to challenge for Nerissa."

"What?" He didn't begin to understand what she meant. She did not explain. "Just tell them what I said. If they ask you questions, pretend to know nothing. They must not see me with you. I'll see you some other time, if I can." She dropped from the rock, slipped into a crevice between two huge boulders and was gone from sight.

Jerry Utah got stiffly to his feet and awaited the approach of the column of blue-clad figures.

CHAPTER II

THEY DIDN'T see him at first. They circled the burning ship, spread out from it to begin a search of the vicinity. He could have run from them, but running would get him nowhere. The girl, Nerissa, might have helped him hide, but she had chosen to do otherwise. She had no reason to help him. So far as he

could see, there was no good hiding place on the whole of Phobos.

The surface was tumbled, broken rocks, utterly inhospitable to life of any sort. If the Martian priests lived here, they had their quarters underground. Food must be brought here from the mother planet, no food could be grown in this rocky soil. There was no vegetation. Not even wild goats could find a living here.

Utah waited for the priests. No sense in going to them, let them come to him. A priest caught sight of him, a voice called out a harsh command in the guttural language of Mars. The priests came trotting toward him.

The men of Mars and the men of Earth looked a lot alike. Martians usually had bigger chests than humans, a development brought about by oxygen needs in the thin air of the Red Planet. They were usually not quite as tall as men but they were heavier built though the heavy build did not mean they were stronger than humans. Physically, the two races were about on a par. Martian skins were the color of old copper, again the result of the thin air blanket over the planet, which let through to the surface an excessive quantity of ultra-violet radiation.

These priests were typical specimens. They surrounded him with a ring of glittering hostile eyes peering at him out of hawk-nosed faces, making him think of vultures surrounding a victim as they waited for him to die.

One, with the bright yellow hood that marked a low order in the hierarchial rank, spoke to him.

"What are you doing here?" The language was Martian, but he had been on the Red Planet long enough to understand what was meant. He explained. They looked curiously at the wrecked ship, this was probably the first ship of human construction most of them had ever seen though they knew that humans were on Mars.

"The crash was an accident," Utah said. "If you will help me get back to the planet, I will be very grateful."

Surely, in spite of what Nerissa had said, a request for help would not go unheeded. After all, he had done nothing wrong by any reasonable standard of conduct. And nobody would refuse to help a man in trouble. Or so he thought.

But on this moon of Mars, the code of conduct was different.

Yellow Hood shrugged, a gesture which said he wasn't interested in helping anybody, and as for the fact that the human had arrived here as a result of an accident, they had their own rules on this moon.

"Kill him," Yellow Hood said. The order was given with utter indifference, as if the life of a man meant no more to him than the life of an insect.

From under the blue robes knives flashed.

Utah was unarmed, if he had been armed it would have made no difference. Before he could have drawn a gun, they would have had a dozen knives buried to the hilt in his body.

Nerissa had been right when she had said they would kill him! Was she also right when she said she knew of a way to save him? If she was wrong, he was a dead man. He lifted his hand, spoke rapidly.

"I wish to challenge for Nerissa."

THE EFFECT of the words was almost magical. The lifted knives stopped moving. Startled eyes were turned toward him. A look of astonishment appeared on the face of Yellow Hood. "You wish to challenge for Nerissa?" he spoke.

"Yes," Utah answered.

"What do you know of Nerissa?"

"Nothing."

"Then why do you wish to challenge for her?"

What was it the girl had said? If they ask questions, tell them nothing. Utah shook his head. "I do not understand the question," he answered.

It was an answer that was not satisfactory to Yellow Hood. The Martian asked other questions, popping them out in guttural bursts of harsh sound. To all of them Utah made the same reply—a shake of the head and the repeated statement that he did not understand. Yellow Hood gave up.

"Very well. According to our custom, anyone who comes here to challenge, must be accepted. You will get your wish."

The tone of his voice said that he didn't think that the wish would do this human much good in the long run. Jerry Utah took a deep breath, drawing the thin air of this moon into his lungs as if he was grateful that he was still able to breathe.

In point of fact, he was grateful. When the knives had flashed, he hadn't expected to do much more breathing of any kind.

They marched him away. He caught a glimpse of a smooth field where the Martians landed their own unwieldy space craft. No hangers, no repair shops were visible. Runways led underground. Apparently the craft were stored under the surface. He was taken underground too. A door was opened. Yellow Hood motioned for him to enter. As he hesitated, Yellow Hood literally kicked him through the door. He sprawled into the room.

Three humans and one Martian looked down at him. The door slammed shut. Torches set in wall sockets flared in a smoky room. Skins were piled in a corner, bedding material. There were no beds, the bed had never been invented on Mars. There was a table, with stools around it.

The three humans looking down at him from these stools were unshaven. Their clothes were wrinkled. They looked as if they had been here for weeks. For a moment they stared at him as if he wasn't exactly welcome here, then as his torn clothing and battered, bloody face made it obvious that he was hurt, they rose as one man and came quickly toward him, to help him if they could.

The lone Martian in the room remained on his stool. His attitude plainly said that he wasn't going to get up to help any damned human who had ever lived.

"Can I help you, old man?"

"Say, you look like you've been in a smash."

"Can we do something for you?" the third man said.

Utah got slowly to his feet. These three humans looked like refugees from a graveyard, they looked like living allegories of want, privation, hunger, and despair, but they had offered to help him. He liked that. "I look a little worse off than I actually am," he answered. "As for doing something for me, if you could arrange to cut the throat of that priest with the yellow hood—"

"Sorry." The tallest of the three laughed bitterly. "I'd like to oblige you. Fact is, nothing is needed worse around this joint than a wholesale throat-cutting, but this pleasant activity is forbidden to animals like us. Anyhow, in this case, you'd have to get in line. Say, don't I know you? Aren't you Jerry Utah?"

UTAH STARED at the tall man. Something about the features

seemed familiar, where had he seen this man? "Harry Henred!" he exclaimed. He remembered now. An altercation in a dive near the space port. A couple of Martians had resented this tall man. There had been a slight rhubarb. Nothing serious, nothing that a knife in the guts wouldn't cure. The two Martians had obviously intended to provide exactly this cure for the tall human when Utah had stepped into the fracas. The result had been a couple of Martians with very sore heads, and two humans who were very firm friends.

Utah's hand shot out and he grinned all over. There was no one in the whole solar system that he would rather have seen here than this tall ex-spaceman. The two men shook hands. "Meet my pals," Henred said, nodding to the two humans. "Sam Bywater and Kelso Mead."

Utah found himself shaking hands with the two men. Bywater was short and squat in stature and built on the general lines of a gorilla. He looked as if terrific strength resided in those hunched shoulders. Kelso Mead was more slender but the look of the coiled snake was somewhere about him. Both seemed very friendly but both of them also seemed to size him up, to look him over carefully, as if they were measuring him as a potential antagonist and were trying to determine his strength and his weakness.

"He's a bad customer in a close fight," Henred drawled, to the two. "That I know for certain. Split-second reactions, wallop of a mule in either fist."

The two grinned—uneasily, Utah thought. He glanced at the Martian, who remained sitting on the stool. "What about him, hasn't he got a name?"

"Yeah, but he's too busy to be polite."

"Busy doing what?"

"Figuring out the best way to cut our throats," Henred answered. "Isn't that right, Kavish, old pal?" he said in the Martian tongue.

Kavish, the Martian, curled his lips in a thin snarl but did not bother answering.

"What are you doing here, Jerry?" Henred questioned. "Did you sucker in on this deal too and come here to play games with us?"

Utah told them what had happened. When he had finished, Henred spoke dolefully. "So you told 'em you had come to challenge for Nerissa? Then you *are* going to play games with us. Welome, pal, to our select little group." His grin was sardonic, a bitter wretched grimace that twisted his face out of all resemblance to the human.

"I don't get it," Utah said.

Henred paused and seemed to grope for words. "Jerry, what do you know about the customs of Mars, especially their religious customs? I don't mean their religious beliefs, I mean the practices they have evolved over the centuries in connection with what they call religion?"

"Damned little. What have their customs got to do with us?"

"Practically everything, including the little matter of life and death. Custom is king here. We were sucked into—and you have run right straight up against—the meanest, most vicious custom ever evolved by the Martian mind—and believe me, that's a broad statement."

"You talk like an expert," Utah commented.

"By profession, I'm a space ship engineer," Henred answered apologetically. "But I've kinda made a hobby of studying customs. Do you know anything about the Chinese?"

"Not much. Why?"

"Because the Martians and the Chinese have much in common.

They're both old races with long histories. The longer a race continues to exist, the more it tends to become fixed in a rut. It develops fixed fashions in clothing, eating, how to greet a superior, how to talk to an inferior, and how to worship God. Every detail of the life of an individual from the cradle to the grave becomes ordered for him—by custom. In time, customs assume all the force of law, and the individual who violates custom is very severely punished, by death if the infraction is serious—and often even if it isn't serious. Custom thus becomes a sort of protective coloration, a method of recognizing members of your own group."

"What does all this have to do with us?"

"I'm coming to that. What we have run up against is a mixture of primitive belief and strange custom. Once this custom we're facing had some kind of a value, but it has long since outlived its usefulness. However, it continues to exist and is as strong today as it was when it was first invented."

HENRED took a deep breath and pulled a package of cigarettes from the pocket of his rumpled jacket. "To understand what we're up against, you've got to understand how it originated. The first part is concerned with the primitive Martian belief that this moon was the home of their gods. Did you know the Martians worshipped this moon?"

"No, I didn't."

"Well, they do. And they worship it because they believe their gods live here."

"But they have space ships that can reach this moon. They ought to know that no gods live here," Utah objected.

"That's exactly the point. The Martians discovered how to build crude space ships. But they never ventured any farther into space than their moons, this moon particularly. Why?"

"I don't know."

"Because the priests seized control of space flight as soon as it was invented. They grabbed the first space ship the Martians ever built. They announced that the space ship was a sacred vessel, that it was to be used to transport priests to and from the home of the gods, this moon. Nobody but a priest has ever been on Phobos. They fly regularly from this moon to Mars. They tell the people on the planet that they come here to learn the will of the gods, that they visit the gods here, and when they return to Mars, they announce to all the people the will of the gods. They've built up one of the tightest monopolies that ever existed anywhere in the solar system and they use this black traffic in superstition to clamp a complete control over the whole planet."

Henred's voice had risen, anger was audible in his tones, anger directed at all forms of superstition. "The Martians are a quiet, peaceful people. Their biggest defect is that they are willing to believe almost anything. For centuries their priests have told them lies and they have believed the lies. The priesthood, with its fountainhead right here on this moon, has every man, woman, and child on the planet by the throat."

He had been speaking in English but the Martian, Kavish, must have understood at least part of what he was saying. Kavish rose to his feet, a snarl on his face. "Sacrilege. Silence, blasphemous dog, before the gods strike you dead."

"Set down before I knock you down," Henred answered. The lanky engineer cocked his fist.

Kavish's hand went inside his robe, came away empty as he reached for a knife he did not possess. He sat down hastily. "If I had a knife you would not talk like this."

"You'll get your chance with a knife." Henred answered. "Just be patient until the time comes."

"But what does all this lead to?" Utah questioned.

"This is all a part of the background," the engineer answered. "It doesn't mean much until you get the rest of this sweet little story, which concerns itself with another custom."

"Go on."

"This custom is the yearly challenge for the vestal virgin."

"Eh?" Utah said, startled. For the first time, he caught a glimpse of what was coming next. He didn't like the looks of it.

"I see you're beginning to get the idea," the engineer continued. "A part of the priestly hierarchy includes a group of women who are presumed to serve the gods but who probably actually serve the priests far more than the gods. These women are taken as children, infants, in fact, and are brought here and raised by the priests, a new one every year. Each year one reaches the age of marriage. Any Martian who wishes to do so many challenge for her, although another custom restricts the number of challengers to five." He looked meaningfully at Utah. "That's where you came into the story, Jerry. When you arrived here, saying you wished to challenge for Nerissa, you brought the challengers up to the proper number—five."

Utah's breath whistled in his throat. The story sounded utterly incredible but he had been long enough on the Red Planet to know that the incredible happened here. There was certainly no reason why Henred should lie to him. Nor did the engineer look like a man who was lying. Nor did he appear to be out of his mind. "But Nerissa is human," he protested.

HENRED smiled wryly. "That fact made it a little hard for the priests this year. Their vestal virgin was a human woman. No Martian wished to challenge for her, except our friend, Kavish here." He nodded sardonically at the Martian seated on the stool, and got a scowl in reply. "That's where we came into the picture. Since they had a human woman and since only one Martian wanted to risk his valuable neck for such a doubtful prospect, they decided they would open the lists to humans. I don't know whether they went around and tried to get volunteers or not. If they tried that, they failed. At any rate, since they couldn't get volunteers, they pretended they had some very special jobs to be done. They offered fancy wages —two thousand dollars a month, gold. They were pretty vague about what was to be done in return for this money, but they succeeded in sucking in Sam Bywater, Kelso Mead, and yours truly. No doubt they were trying to dig up a fifth man when you arrived and solved the problem for them. So here we are, Jerry, the five of us, challenging for Nerissa." The engineer laughed, a sound with no suggestion of mirth in it.

Utah lit a cigarette. In his mind was the thought that he had been through enough for one day, that he deserved a chance to rest, to relax his nerves. He shook his head. "I thought, when I got out of that crash alive, that I was the luckiest fool in the system. I'm not so certain now. How do they work this challenge thing?"

"I'm not certain," the engineer answered. "No doubt they will brief

us later. In essence it's all very simple. The one who remains alive gets Nerissa."

"Huh?"

"He also gets to be a member of the priesthood," the engineer continued.

"But which one of us will remain alive? I mean, how do they determine that interesting little fact?"

"They don't determine it," Kelso Mead spoke for the first time. "We determine it."

"Eh?"

"The one who succeeds in killing the others gets the girl," Henred said laconically.

"That's what I was afraid of," Utah sighed.

CHAPTER III

"BUT WHAT happens if we decide not to play?" Jerry Utah questioned. He had eaten, he had bathed as far as the facilities of Phobos permitted—about a pint of water was allowed for such nonsense as keeping clean—and Henred had patched up his cuts, spreading the wonderful soothing salve of the Martians on them. He felt much better, though he didn't see what good feeling better was going to do him.

"I don't know what happens if we decide not to play," the engineer answered. "They won't take us back to Mars, that I know. I yelled no dice and demanded to be taken back home. All I got in answer was a shrug. Anyhow I think we will play." Grimness crept into his voice as he spoke.

"What makes you think that?"

"Several reasons. One is plain survival. If you and I were put into a locked room and given knives and told that the one who came out of the room alive would be given almost anything he wanted, but that if one of us didn't come out within an hour, both of us would be killed, what would we do, Jerry?"

"I'm dammed if I know," the pilot answered frankly. "I like life."

"So do I," Henred answered. "We all want to live. Four of us have got to die. If we don't kill each other, the priests will kill us. With that kind of a prospect in front of him the meanest mouse of a man who ever lived would fight. And we will fight too, Jerry, much as we would like to do something else. Also, there is the matter of the reward to the winner. I assure you that Nerissa is only part of that reward, maybe the smallest part. Another part is wealth."

"Who the hell cares about money?"

"The wealth you will get here isn't money, it's things that money can't even buy. First is luxury. The finest clothing, the finest foods. Second is power. If you win this rat race, you've automatically got a chance to succeed to the position of high priest of all Mars. Let me tell you, Jerry, that is a position of real power. Within the framework of custom, the word of the high priest is law. Millions of Martians do just exactly what he says. The will to power is a basic human impulse, Jerry. Deep down in their secret hearts most men would like nothing better than to have the power of Ulruk, the high priest of Mars. Thus—we fight. If not for power, then for the chance at life itself."

Utah shook his head. "There may be something in what you say, but I'll be triply damned if I do it."

Henred shrugged thin shoulders. "In that case, Jerry, all I can say is that it was nice to know you."

"You're going to fight?" Utah demanded.

"Not if there is any way to dodge it, but I know myself well enough to know that when the pinch comes, I'll

fight. The only alternative—and this means a hell of a lot more fighting—is to cut the throat of every priest on this moon."

"Then let's do that," Utah said, enthusiastically.

"Jerry, are you out of your head? There are thousands of them!" Henred answered, appalled. He brightened as another thought came to him. "Not that I wouldn't like it, but I don't know any way to get the job done."

THEY WERE a wary, restless, worried lot of humans held prisoner in this locked cell on Phobos. Somewhere on this mad moon death lay waiting for three of them, and each knew it. Perhaps death lay waiting for four of them. The Martian Kavish obviously thought it did. In his mind he was quite certain he could destroy these four humans, when the time came. He made no effort to conceal his opinion of them. "Vermin from across the sky," he called them. They took his insults calmly though the glitter in Henred's eye indicated he was storing away these insults, for future reference. Jerry Utah promised himself that he would remember them too. Deep in his heart he cherished the hope that the Martians, if properly approached, would release him, and the others as well, with the possible exception of Kavish, who obviously did not want to be released. With this thought in mind, when the door opened and priests bearing food entered, Utah demanded to be taken to Ulruk.

His demand produced dismay on the part of the priests. They had no precedent for this action, no one in the position of these men had ever demanded to talk to the high priest, which was perhaps the reason Utah had his request granted. He was marched to Ulruk.

The high priest received him in a small room hung with draperies. Smoky torches provided light—the Martians knew that better systems of illumination existed, but custom barred their introduction. The room was heavy with smoke and thick with a choky incense. Ulruk was seated in a heavy chair. Guards with spears held ready to thrust stood on both sides of the chair. Utah did not doubt that other guards, with more effective weapons, were hidden behind the draperies.

Ulruk was a skinny gnome. He was old, old, old. His skin was withered and wrinkled and only his eyes were alive. In them was malevolence. Looking out from the wrinkled face, they saw nothing but only served to reflect the evil glittering behind them. This Martian had outlived life itself. All that kept him alive now was hate—of all things living.

The red-hooded priest—a member of the upper tier of this hierarchy—who had conducted Utah to this reception threw himself flat on the floor before Ulruk, and motioned the human to do likewise.

Utah stood very firmly on both feet. "To hell with it," he said.

From the floor, Red Hood made frantic gestures to him to obey.

"To hell with you too," Utah said.

The spear points were dropped and were pointed at his stomach. The muscles of the guards tensed to lunge. Utah lifted his hand.

"If you kill me now, you will have to find another sucker for your games," he spoke. "Only four will be left. And that will violate custom." Four lifted fingers emphasized his meaning.

Ulruk looked startled. He spoke a single low word to the guards. The spears were drawn back. The glittering eyes looked wonderingly at Utah.

"I demand that I and the other hu-

mans here be returned to the surface of Mars," the pilot said. This was no time to cringe or fawn and to attempt to placate fate. A hard-driven bitter bluff might work. He was certain that nothing else would work.

"You *demand?*" Ulruk spoke in Martian. He was startled. There was no doubt about that. This was probably the only time in his life that any two-legged creature had dared to stand in his presence.

"That is what I said," Utah answered.

THE HIGH priest held a small golden ball in his hands, the sacred religious symbol of all Mars, the sphere, the only perfect geometrical figure. He toyed with the sphere, clasping and unclasping his fingers around it. He said nothing. The only sound in the stifling room was the frightened breathing of the red-hooded priest on the floor and he seemed on the verge of death from pure fright.

Then, very slowly, Ulruk began to laugh.

At the sound, Jerry Utah got sick at his stomach. He knew he had lost.

"It will be a great pleasure for me to watch you die in the maze or on the sword-point of a challenger," the high priest said. "You will fight very hard to keep from dying. And that will make the sight all the more pleasant."

Again the laughter rose in the stifling room. Abruptly it ceased.

"Take him away," Ulruk spoke, to the red-hooded priest who had brought the human here.

Jerry Utah knew he had gotten his audience, he had tried to run his bluff, and it had failed.

"You will sing a different tune when the space ships begin to drop H-bombs on this rotten moon," he said.

Ulruk laughed again. "In what century do you think this will happen?" he questioned.

It was a question that had only one answer. The human race had a foothold in space. They could cross regularly between the Earth and Mars, between the Earth and Venus. But it would be many a decade before they had anything that remotely resembled a space navy, before they could drop H-bombs, or any other kind of bombs, on any planet or any moon. And Ulruk knew it as well as he did.

With spear points at his recalcitrant back, Jerry Utah was marched back to the cell where he and the others were held. Henred smiled wryly when he was told what had happened. Bywater cursed. Mead was silent. Kavish grinned. "You are lucky you came away from the presence of the great one alive. Under any other circumstances, you would have been so much dead meat. Because of your blasphemy, cutting your throat will give me even greater satisfaction."

"When do they put this show on the road?" Utah asked.

"I don't know," Henred answered. "They haven't bothered to tell us. Are you in a hurry?"

"I guess not," Utah said.

He went to sleep that night with mixed memories tangling in his mind like tom-cats fighting on an alley fence. There was the memory of his crash. Something deep down inside of him was still in a state of shock because of this crash. The memory of Nerissa lingered in his mind, strangely sweet and strangely bitter. She had been responsible for his crash. Yet she hadn't intended to harm him. And when he had crashed, she had tried to save him. What was inside this human girl marooned here among the

savage priests of Phobos? Did she know she was the prize of the fierce competition to be staged here on this moon? What did she think about it? What would happen to her if Kavish won the competition?

Even asleep, Jerry Utah did not want to think about that.

Another memory, perhaps the bitterest of all, was the memory of Ulruk's laughter. That bit deep. Around him Henred, Bywater, and Mead twisted restlessly in their sleep. Only Kavish slept soundly, and he snored like a dothar, the Martian camel.

THE NEXT day the men were still restless and uneasy, watching each other warily as they were trying to detect hidden weaknesses, ways to strike when the time came. But the next night was different. Again Kavish snored like a camel with a full stomach but Jerry Utah awakened.

At first he thought he was having a nightmare. He lay very still on the folded skins that served to make the stone floor into a bed, staring at the image that seemed to hang in front of his eyes.

It was the girl, Nerissa.

She was there in the room, hanging in front of his eyes, as clear and as distinct as a picture.

He realized it wasn't a nightmare. It was the *uni projection.*

It didn't exist in the air in front of his eyes, it hadn't existed in the plastic panel of the control cabin. It existed in his own brain, created there by some form of telepathic control exercised by Nerissa herself.

He sat up quickly. The image moved as he moved. It seemed to be at a distance of about two feet from him. It kept that distance.

The face of the girl showed fear.

"Please! Don't move or the others may awaken." Her voice was a thin whisper drifting out of nowhere, an electric movement in his brain cells. He knew he wasn't hearing with his ears and wasn't seeing with his eyes.

In other circumstances, he would have marveled at the illusion of reality created by the *uni projection.* It was so nearly perfect that he was almost certain the girl was here with him. He sat very still in the dark room that was lighted only by the dimly flickering torches in their wall sockets.

Henred twisted in his sleep, Kavish snored.

"I slipped sleepers into the guard's drink," her whisper came again. "I am just outside the door. Come quickly. But don't make any noise."

Mead rolled over in his sleep and cursed. Utah sat very still. The *uni projection* vanished. Mead lay back down again. Jerry Utah got very slowly to his feet, moved toward the door.

It was open an inch.

Outside, under the light of a wall torch, a guard who had fallen from his stool snored noisily on the floor. Waiting outside was the girl, Nerissa. She took his arm.

"Come quickly!"

He followed her away from the door, to a side passage where there were no lights. Words tumbled from her lips. Part of them were English, part Martian.

"I have given sleepers to the guards at the hangers. They *finduck* like that stupid one back there. We will go there *malverno.* The ship you will fly. You will take both of us away from this place."

Jerry Utah felt his heart jump. Here was help from a source he had not anticipated, real help. She knew her way around this mad moon. She could take both of them to the hangers.

Even if the ships kept there were of Martian design, he could fly them.

He could fly anything that had an engine in it, that had a pilot's seat. Once they were away from this moon, they were certain to reach the surface of the planet in safety. There, among their own kind, they would find help. True, they would be in danger as long as they were on Mars, but an Earth-bound space ship could take them away from the Red Planet forever.

FOR A moment, he treasured the mad thought of stealing an H-bomb on earth and bringing it back here and personally delivering it to Ulruk. It was fantasy, and he knew it. There was no way he could steal an H-bomb. They were too well guarded.

Nerissa pulled at his arm. "Come," she urged.

Jerry Utah started. And stopped. "Just a minute. I'll get the others," he said.

"What others?"

"Henred, Bywater, and Mead, the three other humans."

"Are they your friends?"

"Well, not exactly—"

"Then leave them there. We have no time. The guards will rouse from the effect of the sleepers."

"But we can't just go off and leave them."

"Why can't we?" Both anger and perplexity sounded in her voice, anger because they were being delayed, perplexity because she could not understand the cause of the delay. "What are they to us?"

"Nothing. But Henred is a good joe. And the other two are human. I'm not going off and leave a human being in this kind of a stinking mantrap if I can help it."

"But—"

"There are no 'buts'. Nerissa, I don't get your objections. The ship can carry five as well as two—"

"But taking them with us means taking extra chances. They may make a noise at the wrong time. Also, we have no time."

"Then we'll just have to take the extra chances," he insisted doggedly. He saw she didn't understand. For a moment, dislike of her rose in him. She was a heartless, unthoughtful witch. Let Kavish have her. She deserved exactly that. Then he remembered she had been raised from childhood here on this moon. She didn't know any better, she hadn't had a chance to learn. The dislike of her began to go away.

"Wait here, Nerissa. It won't take a minute."

The guard still snored at the door. Utah went silently back into the big room. Henred awakened at the touch of a hand on his shoulder. "What is it?"

"Get up. We're getting out of here."

Kavish snored on. Mead and Bywater awakened instantly. They moved softly toward the door.

Kavish's snore died in a gurgle and he sat up. "What's going on here?" he grumbled.

In the dim light from the dying torches, his chin was not a clear target. But such as it was, Utah used it as an aiming point. With every erg of muscle energy in his body behind it, Utah's fist connected with the Martian's chin.

Kavish went over backward. He was knocked cold by the blow.

They waited just long enough to tie and gag him. At the door, they had a gag around the guard's mouth before he knew what was happening. Tied hand and foot, he was thrown bodily into the room he had been assigned to guard.

Henred took the knife the guard had carried. Utah took the short spear. The four of them moved quickly to the dark passage where Nerissa

nervously awaited their coming.

"Hurry," she whispered.

At a trot, she led them through dark, silent passages carved out of the heart of this mad moon.

CHAPTER IV

"I WANT you to know that I appreciate this," Henred said.

"Me too," Mead and Bywater added, in the same breath.

"We're not out of here yet," Utah answered.

"And we won't get out if all of you don't shut up," Nerissa spoke.

She was moving through a winding passage. Occasional wall torches provided the only light. Many of the torches had burned down and had not been replaced. In consequence, for long distances, there wasn't any light at all. But she seemed to know exactly where she was going. The general direction she was taking seemed to be downward.

"It would be quicker if we went a more direct way, but there is less chance of being seen."

They passed a stairway that led downward. From the stairway came a faint hum, as of powerful machinery operating far away.

"What's down there?" Utah questioned.

"The gravity machines, at the core of the moon," Nerissa answered.

"I'd like to see those machines," Utah said.

"So would I!" Henred spoke quickly. "Those artificial gravity machines are the most important thing on the whole damned moon!" Excitement sounded in the engineer's voice. "Jerry, if we could get down there—"

"Sh!" Nerissa whispered.

A file of blue-clad priests had appeared on the stairway. Slowly and sedately, they were marching downward. "They go to take care of the machines," Nerissa whispered. "Come." She moved forward again, hurrying as if unnamed and unguessed fears were driving her.

Suddenly she stopped moving.

"Listen!" she whispered.

From somewhere in the distance came a chant, the whisper of a chorus of voices.

At the sound, Nerissa's face went paper white. "Ulruk and his singing slaves!" she whispered. "They have discovered you have escaped. They are coming after us."

"Then let's move, fast, to the hangers!" Utah said.

"We can't escape. There is no way to escape from Ulruk and his singing slaves."

"But they're a long ways off. Come on."

She stood stiff and still under the light from a dripping torch. "When you can hear the sound of the singing, it is already too late. They are too close for you to escape." She seemed to be speaking with difficulty. The words came from her lips slowly, with each syllable stressed. Her breast was heaving as if she was having trouble breathing.

"What's wrong with you?" Utah spoke. As the words left his mouth he was aware that he too was speaking slowly. He caught a glimpse of Kelso Mead. The spaceman was stretching his neck and apparently trying to move. Henred and Bywater also seemed to be in trouble.

"When you can hear the sound—you can no longer move," the girl spoke.

"Can't move!" Utah thought the words would explode from his lips. Instead they came slowly, in a whisper.

"Something—wrong with me," Henred muttered.

"I'm caught," Bywater whispered.

"What in the hell—" Utah took

a step toward the girl. Or he intended to move toward her. He discovered that his legs would not obey his will.

A PARALYSIS was settling over his muscles. Breathing was becoming difficult. Sweat poured out of him as he strained. His feet seemed to be glued to the floor.

"What—what is this?" he whispered. Ghastly fear was in him. Nothing in all his experience had prepared him for this sudden paralysis. True, he had heard the stories they told around the space ports, stories of the Martian legends about this moon, and of the all-powerful high priest who ruled it. But he had regarded the legends as fables, fantasies of the Martian mind. While he knew the Martians regarded this moon with a mixture of superstitious awe and dread, he had assumed that the powerful hold of custom accounted for their reactions. Was there something more on this moon than superstition?

"It is the power of Ulruk," the girl whispered. "He comes. No one may move."

Down the corridor the chanting grew louder.

"The singing slaves carry him," the girl whispered.

"But how—did he know—where we were?" The words were jerky on Utah's lips.

"He—sees anything he wishes. It is like—the *uni projection*. He saw us that way."

"But I didn't see him."

"He is more skillful—in the use of —the *uni projection* than I am. He sees without being seen."

"But why can't we move?"

"Because he wills us to stand still."

"But how does he do it?"

"I do not know. He has great powers." She was shrinking in abject fear as the chant grew louder. All her life here on this moon she had been subjected to the will of the high priest. This conditioning was coming out strongly now. Or perhaps she really believed that Ulruk was actually all-powerful.

For the first time Jerry Utah understood why she had been so afraid when she had dared to release them, why she had urged them to hurry, why she had seemed in such desperate haste. She had known that this might happen.

"What will Ulruk do to you—for helping us?"

"Nothing. I am sacred to the winner of the challenge."

The chant had grown to a full-throated roar. There was no question that the chanters were coming straight toward them. The walls of the corridor reflected vaguely the light of torches. Came into sight torch bearers. Spearmen followed them. Following the spearmen was a large canopied sedan chair. It was borne by sixteen Martian slaves, eight on each side.

Riding in the chair, clutching in his fingers the golden ball that was the symbol of his authority, was Ulruk.

JERRY UTAH made one last desperate effort to break the bonds of paralysis that held his muscles.

Nothing happened. If he had been chained to the floor he could not have been held any more effectively. He couldn't even lift an arm. All he could do was stare from startled eyes that he could not even blink at the incredible procession drawing steadily nearer.

Was this priest actually in possession of tremendous powers that enabled him to see events at a distance, that enabled him to freeze men motionless? There was no doubting the truth. Watching the procession approach, Utah understood the frantic

fear of the red-hooded priest when he had refused to prostrate himself before Ulruk. At the time, he had thought that custom and superstitious fear had been involved, but now he saw that back of the custom, back of the fear and the awe, there was a hard core of real power.

There was a reason why the priest who ruled this moon also ruled Mars and the reason was more than superstition. It had its roots in incredible power which hid behind custom and superstition, which used these two forces as shields to mask its real strength.

Power was here on the moon of Mars, power which until now no human had ever guessed existed. Hidden power, secret power, cunning power. But power as real as the explosion of a hydrogen bomb.

What was this power, how was it used, how was it projected, how was it controlled? Again like mad acrobats drunk with marijuana, questions were tumbling over each other in Jerry Utah's mind. He did not question that most Martians thought this power was supernatural, they had little choice except to think this, and little chance to find out otherwise, but he came from a race that had spent centuries trying to find out what was hidden behind the veil of superstition. The Martians might not ask the questions, and might not try to answer them. But he would ask them, he would try to find answers to them. He was a man. His most precious heritage was the open, inquiring mind of his race, the mind that accepted as grist to its mill every fact that came to it, grinding up the facts in an effort to find the kernel of truth hidden behind them.

Ulruk might be able to reach out with an invisible force and paralyze his body. But how did this force work, what was it, how was it controlled, what were the limits of its application? There was an answer somewhere, an answer that could be expressed in terms of formula, just as the thrust of a rocket engine could be expressed in these terms, the lift of the wing of a ship designed to operate in an atmosphere, the burning characteristics of a fuel. There had to be an answer. All of science said there had to be an answer to every question. The trick was to ask the right question.

In his case, the trick was to ask the right question, and to stay alive while he did it. For all he knew, he might not be alive at the end of the next five minutes. One of those spearmen advancing toward them might run him through with the point of the blade he carried.

He ignored the spearmen. If they killed him, they killed him. He watched Ulruk. The spearmen were singing slaves, taking orders, able to bring death, but of no more real importance than the spears they carried, and not to be given more consideration than a weapon without a hand to hold it.

Ulruk was the source of danger.

The high priest riding in the sedan chair looked utterly relaxed, as if nothing could threaten him. Only the hands clutching the golden ball were tight and nervous.

AT THE sight of those restless hands something clicked in Jerry Utah's mind. It was a hunch, a feeling, an intuitive grasp of a pattern. Deep in his mind he had the suspicion that even if he knew nothing about the real nature of the power Ulruk possessed, he at least knew the switchboard through which it was controlled.

The golden ball. Inside that religious symbol, inside that perfect geometrical figure, manipulated by the pressure of Ulruk's fingers at vari-

ous points, was a remote control device that reached out to some hidden generator in some secret control room here on this moon.

Ulruk's power was controlled through the golden ball.

But even if he had guessed the truth, what could he do about it? Even if he had the ball in his hands, how could he use it? He did not understand the system of switches, he did not know the nature of the force or how to focus and control it.

All he knew was the control point. That was something. But it wasn't much.

The spearmen stopped. The slaves stood still. The chanting went into silence. Ulruk looked down at the helpless group before him. Amusement glittered in his eyes.

"Were you going somewhere?" he asked softly, in Martian.

Jerry Utah, trying to answer, found he lacked even the power to move his jaws. This was one time when he would not tell Ulruk or anybody else to go to hell.

In the silence the only sound was Ulruk's gentle laughter.

"You're going back where you came from," Ulruk said.

Little by little the paralysis began to lift. With spears at their backs, they were marched away. Nerissa came with them for a distance, walking with a sagging droop to her shoulders as if all her hopes were dying here, then spearmen were detached to escort her elsewhere.

The last sight they had of her she was walking down a corridor with two brawny spearmen following behind her.

Somehow she found the strength to turn and wave at them.

It was the gesture of parting.

Back at the cell from which they had escaped, two new guards were on duty at the door. They were very much alert and they looked as if they had no intention of ever going to sleep during the remainder of their lives.

A group of blue-clad priests were emerging from the cell. They were carrying a heavy object. At the sight of their burden, Utah understood why the two new guards looked so very alert.

The burden of the priests was the body of the former guard. He was still bound, still gagged.

They hadn't bothered to remove his bonds before they slit his throat—as a penalty for allowing himself to be duped into taking a drink containing what Nerissa had called sleepers.

The humans stared at the sight. "Maybe they slit Kavish's throat too," Henred suggested hopefully.

They entered the cell. Kavish himself looked up at them from a stool. He grinned at them. "I knew you would be back," he said. "Nobody ever escapes here. Nobody has ever tried to escape, up until now." The tone of his voice said they were stupid idiots for making such an attempt.

"Ah, go to sleep," Utah said wearily.

Kavish yawned. "Twelve zonars from now, we go to the arena for the challenge," he said.

The four humans stared at each other.

Kavish rose from the stool and moved toward the sleeping skins.

"I want to be well rested when the time comes to kill you," he said.

Rolling himself up in the skins, he went to sleep.

CHAPTER V

IT WAS A weird and incredible scene that took place twelve zonars later. The four humans and the single Martian were led from the cell under close guard by blue-clad priests.

They were marched down toward the center of the moon, their way lighted by flaring torches. When they reached their destination, they found themselves in a single long room, out of which opened five doors. The doors were closed now. Each had a walled runway leading to it. Once you were in the runway, you had to move toward the door directly ahead of you. There was no other way to go.

The blue-clad priests ordered them to strip.

"Well, here goes nothing," Henred sighed, beginning to remove his rumpled clothes.

They got new outfits here in this place, sandals, a round shield about a foot in diameter, a short sword about three feet in length, a belt with a sheath that contained a knife with a needle point and a razor edge.

"It is for the grace stroke," one of the blue clad priests explained, indicating the knife.

"How long will this farce continue?" Jerry Utah asked.

The priests shrugged. "That depends on you."

"How does it depend on me?"

"It will continue until only one is left alive. We do not know how long that will be. Many zonars, perhaps."

"But what about food? What about water?"

"Food and water will both be found where you are going," the priests answered enigmatically.

"What happens if one of us gets hurt bad but isn't dead?" Kelso Mead questioned. The spaceman was already showing signs of violent internal strain, a pulse was jumping in his forehead and his hands were shaky.

The priest shrugged. "The grace knife is provided to solve that problem," he answered.

"But suppose nobody survives?" Utah questioned. "It could happen that way?"

"Oh, in that case customs provides that the girl becomes the bride of the high priest," was the answer.

"You've got an answer to everything," Kelso Mead spoke. "What's your answer to this?" From his belt, he snatched the grace knife—plunged it up to the hilt in the priest's heart.

The Martian went down, coughed, spewed blood from his mouth, and died. Like a wild animal Kelso Mead backed away, the red knife in his hand, his teeth bared in a snarl.

Utah expected that Mead would be speared instantly. But no such thing happened. The priests presented the points of their spears at Kelso Mead. Faced with the glittering points, the spaceman was backed into a runway, held there by three priests who kept their spears ready. But no attempt was made to harm the spaceman or to avenge the death of the priest.

"Any questions?" another priest asked.

"No," Kavish answered. "We are ready." He trotted into one of the runways, stood waiting before the closed door, shield on his left arm, sword blade glittering in his brawny right hand. Kavish was ready, willing, and eager. He was a war-horse hearing the sound of trumpets, scenting the blood of the fallen, and eager to be at the scene of battle.

Henred shrugged. Signs of strain were also visible on the face of the tall engineer but from some hidden strength of soul, he found the courage to grin. His sword came up in a salute to Jerry Utah. *"Morituri te salutamus,"* he said wryly.

IT WAS THE ancient salutation of the gladiators to the Roman emperor before games began being repeated in another form and with another purpose here on this moon of Mars. Jerry Utah's sword swept up in an answering salute. "You're a

good guy, Henred. I wish we could stand shoulder to shoulder against these priests instead of against each other."

"So do I," Henred answered. They spoke in English. The priests, who did not understand, stared curiously at them, thinking that perhaps this was the way these people from across the sky prepared to die.

"Into the runways," a priest spoke.

There was a runway and a door for each man. Jerry Utah moved into the nearest passage. The door was in front of him. Behind him were the spears of the priests. The man who stood here—or the Martian—went through this door when it opened, or met death at the hands of the priests behind him.

Standing there, waiting for the door to open, he wondered how many Martians had stood here during the centuries that had passed since this rite had been established here. There must have been many. What had happened to them? Four out of five died. The one who survived—and this was a grim test of bitter survival—might become a high priest of Mars. On the walls were names, scratched there by sword points as the Martians had waited, dozens of them in the crabbed Martian script. One name caught Utah's eye. Ulruk!

The high priest had come this way.

Creaking on un-oiled hinges, the door opened in front of him. The instant it opened, the priests behind him advanced toward his back, their spears level. Jerry Utah took a deep breath—and stepped through the door.

He found himself in a vast open area that seemed to stretch away for miles into the distance. The light in here was dim, on either side lines of torches set in the walls receded away and away, until the eye no longer distinguished the individual lights. The whole vast amphitheater had been hollowed out of the interior of the moon. And it had been constructed to represent the Martian idea of heaven—a vast oasis.

Like the desert-dwelling Arabs of Earth, the Martians, living among the torrid dust of the red deserts, where water was scarce and vegetation scarcer, where life was bitter and harsh, had conceived of heaven as a land of flowing streams, of green trees, of fountains spurting waters into the clean cool air, of green grass and bright spots of meadow.

Here in the interior of this moon, they had created a replica of their idea of heaven. The flowing streams were here, rounded hills, green meadows and trees, though how they got the vegetation to grow without sunlight was a miracle in itself. But it was here.

Here also was sudden death.

UTAH HEARD the door swing shut behind him, never to open again until the next man or the next Martian came this way. A distance of ten feet separating them, the four men and the single Martian stood side by side. Henred was on Utah's right, Bywater on his left. Then came Kelso Mead—then Kavish.

And Kavish was ready. With a fierce cry, he swung his sword in a short arc and brought it down on the head of Kelso Mead, a savage blow that split the spaceman's skull down to his shoulders.

Kelso Mead died without a sound. The spaceman never knew what hit him or that he had been hit. He crumpled and went down, falling on the strip of grass that came up to the edge of the wall. No grace stroke was necessary. Nor did Kavish attempt to give one. Snatching his sword free, he struck at Bywater.

But that burly spaceman had seen what had happened to his companion.

His left arm came up. The Martian's sword rang on the metal of the shield. Bywater lifted his sword. He knew nothing of sword fighting but he was prepared to do the best he could. A single blow from his powerful arm would split a man from chin to groin. Kavish darted back from the threat.

For an instant, the Martian stood balanced on the balls of his feet like a cat ready to spring. A fighting snarl was on his face. He had tasted blood and he liked it. Utah sprang to the right side of Bywater, Henred moved up on the left.

The Martian snarled and backed away. Turning, he slid out of sight, vanishing into the recesses of the mighty arena.

"Things happen mighty damned fast around this place," Henred muttered. He wiped sweat from his face, looked down at the body of Kelso Mead. *"Morituri*— So long, Kelso. Maybe you had it coming for knifing that priest, but according to my way of thinking, you deserved a chance, which you didn't get. Do you think Kavish went yellow all of a sudden?" His eyes sought the direction where the Martian had disappeared.

"I don't think so," Utah answered. "I think he just realized he couldn't take on three of us so he decided he would try to catch us one at a time."

"I'd as soon be loose in a den of rattlesnakes as be loose in here with that Indian running wild," Bywater spoke. "He aims to do us in."

"Did you expect him to have any other aim?" Henred questioned. Acid crept into his voice, a reflection of the torment going on inside him. "What kind of a fool are you, Sam! He's going to try to kill us. He has announced his intention often for even you to get it."

"Well, you don't have to get hot about it," Bywater answered angrily. "All I said was—" He gripped the sword and the shield and was apparently about to strike at the engineer.

"Cut it out!" Utah spoke sharply. "This is no time to turn loose your tempers, this is a time to be calm. There is just a chance, if we work this right, that we have a way to get out of here."

"How's that?" Henred spoke quickly.

"By sticking together," Utah answered. "If we stick together, we can lick Kavish—and maybe all the priests on this damned moon."

"Have you got something on your mind you're not telling us?" Henred asked. "Some idea, some plan—"

"Nothing but hope," Utah answered. "Are you willing to stick with me, to fight with me, to stand side by side with me no matter what comes?"

"You know I'm willing," Henred answered. "But what about Sam?"

"I'll stick," Bywater answered.

THEY MADE their compact then and there and they shook hands on it. In the face of a common danger, they were uniting in a protective device as old as the human race. It was this ability to unite, to co-operate, to stick together in family, clan, and national group, that distinguished the human from the animals.

"What's first on the schedule, Jerry?" Henred said.

"We'll scout this place, we'll find out what is here and what it looks like, the sources of food and water that the priests said could be found here. We'll try to learn everything there is to know about this arena, then we'll make our plans."

"It sounds as if you are considering a long stay here," the engineer spoke.

"Maybe, maybe not," Utah answered. He moved away, keeping the wall always to his right, saw some-

thing lying in the grass, moved around it. "But I hope we won't stay here as long as he did," he said, pointing.

What he had seen in the grass was a mouldering skeleton, a relic of some long-gone struggle.

"One of the four who didn't make the grade," Bywater spoke. The burly spaceman was nervous, apprehensive. He was constantly turning his head as if he suspected that Kavish might be creeping up behind him.

They circled the cavern. Counting his steps, Jerry Utah estimated that it was almost two miles in circumference. The walls were stone. There were doors at intervals but each door was tightly closed. When they came back to the body of Kelso Mead, they knew they had circled the place.

"Hello, what's this?" Henred spoke.

A trap door had slid up in a section of the circling wall, revealing an opening behind it. Cautiously they approached it. The opening was actually nothing but a hole in the wall.

It contained food, the rough Martian bread, cuts of meat, cooked, savory and steaming. It contained a single small can of water. And another jar which held spiced Martian wine.

At the sight of what was contained in the hole, Sam Bywater moved hastily forward.

"Wait a minute," Utah said sharply. "How do we know this stuff is all right to eat? It may be poisoned."

The burly spaceman stopped in his tracks. He turned a startled face toward the test pilot.

"The food is excellent. So is the water and the wine," the voice of a priest spoke from an opening in the back side of the hole. "You have nothing to fear from eating it."

Behind the hole was a priest observing them. They could not see him but they knew he was there.

"He says it's all right," Bywater urged. "And I'm hungry."

"Me too," Henred said.

"There's a catch somewhere," Utah insisted. He moved forward to the hole, examined the food containers. Suddenly he saw the catch in the whole situation.

"How often will this food be supplied?" he spoke to the priest behind the wall.

"Once every 18 zonars," came the answer.

Utah began to laugh. "Is there any other source of food or water in this place?"

"None," the unseen priest answered.

Utah's laughter took on a hysterical note. "Eighteen zonars is roughly the equivalent of twenty-four hours in our system of time measurement. There is enough food and water and wine here for one man. There isn't enough for two or for three or four. Just one man can eat and drink."

Henred and Bywater stared at him.

"Don't you see what is going to happen, in the long run?" he continued. "There is only enough food and water for one man. There are four of us here, including Kavish. We're faced with the choice of fighting each other for food and water—or starving to death!"

CHAPTER VI

"WHAT ARE we going to do, Jerry?" Henred asked.

"We're going to split this food and water four ways," Utah answered. He had taken the food from the hole in the wall and the trap door had closed. Now he grimly set about the task of dividing it. Astonishment on their faces, the two men watched him. Henred licked his lips.

"*Four* ways?" he said.

"That's what I want to know too,"

Bywater spoke. "Why *four* ways? There's not really enough for one."

"You are forgetting Kavish," Utah answered. The jerk of his head indicated the maze of shrubbery that grew in this fake oasis. "He's out there somewhere, probably watching us."

"And waiting for the chance to stab us in the back!" Bywater exploded. "Why should we do anything for him?"

"He's just as hungry as we are," Utah answered.

"I don't give a damn how hungry he is, I hope he starves to death. He killed Kelso and he'll kill us, if he gets the chance."

"Sure he will," Utah answered.

"And you're still going to give him something to eat." The face of the spaceman was becoming convulsed as anger began to rise in him.

"I am," Utah answered.

"By God, you're not going to give him any of my share." The sword that Bywater held came up, he slashed out with it. Utah stepped quickly backward.

Henred stepped in and caught Bywater from behind. "Cut it out, you idiot!" the engineer growled.

"Let go of me! This damned fool is trying to give away food that rightfully belongs to me."

"I know it. Did it ever occur to you that he might know what he's doing?"

"No. What is he doing?"

"There is one thing I might be doing," Utah answered. "Kavish is a Martian. The priests who prepared this food are also Martians. How do we know that these Martians aren't sticking together?"

"I don't get it," Bywater answered sullenly.

"Maybe the Martians may want Kavish to win this competition. Maybe they're trying to help him. Maybe this food is poisoned."

"What?" Consternation showed on Bywater's face. "I—I hadn't thought of that."

Utah stepped close, kept his voice low. "I'm not saying it's true, I'm saying it *might* be true. I'm as hungry as you are, but I'm willing to wait until Kavish eats his portion. Then I'll feel I'm safe in eating mine."

PICKING up the dishes that held the food and the containers that held the water and wine, he carried them into the green growth. Henred followed him. "How are we going to offer this to Kavish?" he asked.

"We're going to put it down and let him come for it. It's almost certain that he is watching us. Kavish!" He lifted his voice in a shout, waited for an answer.

"What do you want?" Kavish's voice came. But the Martian himself remained concealed.

"Here's your share of the food and water," Utah said.

"What?" Kavish sounded as if he did not believe his ears. "You mean you're giving me something to eat?"

"Sure."

"I don't believe it, I think you're just trying to trick me."

"Think what you please," Utah answered. "We're leaving it here. You can eat it or you can leave it alone." He moved away, Henred following.

"Actually, what are you doing?" the engineer questioned.

"I'm casting a little bread upon the waters," Utah answered.

"That's what I thought," Henred answered. "You're trying to make friends with this Martian killer."

"He is no more of a killer than you or me, he is what custom and belief have made him. If I can make friends with him, we might have four on our side."

Henred's eyes lit up. "I like you, Jerry," he said. "I like the way you

do business, I like what's inside of you."

"Thanks."

They moved away. Later, from a distance, they watched Kavish come out of hiding. He ate the food they had left.

"Well, we know we can take a chance on it," Henred said, watching.

They moved back to the doors where they had left Bywater.

The burly spaceman was gone. Their share of the food which they had left behind was gone too. Bywater had eaten it, then had hid from them. Henred cursed beneath his breath, all the violent oaths that a space engineer might know.

"The pressure got to be higher than he could take," Utah said simply. "He was hungry and scared. He ate because food meant security to something inside of him. With a full stomach, he wouldn't be quite as scared as he was when his belly was empty. Then he hid from us because he was afraid to face us."

"That pressure doesn't seem to be getting you."

"Me? I'm a test pilot. Or I was. We get so used to looking death in the eye that a little thing like an empty belly doesn't bother me." Utah shrugged, a careless gesture which said what the hell? "Anyhow, we'll get something else to eat eighteen zonars from now."

"Yeah, and we'll have to fight both Kavish and Bywater for it," the engineer answered. "They'll be here looking for their share."

"That's the purpose of the food that is being provided, to make us fight each other, in case we show reluctance. The question is—Are we going to stick together, the two of us? Or are we going to let them trick us into fighting?"

"I'm going to stick with you," Henred answered.

IN THE HUGE cavern, there was no sound. If they were being watched —and Ulruk had indicated he was going to watch—there was no sign of it. The two men stayed close to each other. In the dim light coming from the torches on the circling walls, wearing loin cloths and sandals and nothing else, carrying shields and swords, they looked like two warriors out of Earth's dawn history—or like gladiators out of the days of Rome's decadence. They saw nothing of Kavish or Bywater but both were there somewhere. Hours passed. Nothing happened. Both were tired and sleepy, the fatigue of pure nervous strain was beginning to tell on them.

"This thing can go on for weeks," Henred said. "What are we going to do? We've got to sleep sometime?"

"I imagine sleeping was a problem that worried a lot of Martians in this place," Utah answered. "We'll take turns standing guard." They didn't have a coin to flip, instead they drew straws to see who slept first.

Henred won. He selected a place where a tree grew close to the wall, forming a natural shelter, laid the sword handy, curled up and went to sleep. Utah found a spot from which he could watch in all directions and prepared himself to wait for whatever might happen.

It wasn't long in coming. First, there was movement in a tangle of shrubbery, the slightest possible movement as though a shadow was coming to life there. Utah saw the moving shadow but not by the shift of a single muscle anywhere in his body did he indicate that he was aware of it. If the shadow was either Kavish or Bywater, he was ready—he hoped.

Then, without warning, the shadow was blotted out—by the *uni projection* with the face of Nerissa squarely in the middle of his vision. He stared at her, startled.

She looked at him, then past him as the sleeping engineer.

"Quick, stab him while he is asleep!" her voice whispered the words in Utah's mind.

"What?" the startled pilot gasped. He simply did not believe he had understood correctly.

"Kill him quickly before he awakens!" the Martian words whispering in his mind told him he had heard correctly.

"Do you mean you want me to stab a man while he is asleep?"

"Of course. It will be easy."

"I don't doubt that. The point is—"

"Then I will help you destroy the other two," the voice whispered eagerly in his mind.

Aghast, Jerry Utah stared at the face in the projection. It was all in his mind, he knew, and the words seemed clear enough, but he simply could not bring himself to believe that Nerissa would make such a suggestion. "You don't know what you're saying, you don't mean it."

"But I do mean it!" Doubt showed on the projected face. "What is wrong with you? Don't you know a chance when you see one?"

"The chance to stab a friend in the back is not the kind of chance I want," Utah answered. "Didn't you ever hear of ethics?"

"Ethics?" Confusion showed on the face. "What's that?"

"If you don't know what it is, I can't tell you." Disgust was rising in him. "Get away from me. And stay away."

"But you don't seem to understand— I am one of the prizes you will get if you win. And to win, you must kill these people."

"You're a prize I don't want and wouldn't have even if I won."

As if this was a totally new idea, the face in the projection looked startled. "Do—do you mean that?" the whisper came.

"I never meant anything more in my life."

AN IMPRESSION of disgust showed on the startled face of the projection, disgust which said that this man was an obvious fool to put friendship ahead of his own personal interests. The projection vanished. Jerry Utah was left shaken and trembling. While Nerissa had grown up here among the Martian priests, which meant that exceptions had to be made for her, it still seemed that she should have some conception of right and wrong. She should have been born with some figment of a conscience. But apparently she hadn't.

The whole situation made him sick deep down inside. He had been tired and sleepy and nervous. Now the fatigue seemed to grow stronger. He swore bitterly beneath his breath. Yet if he had been a Martian, probably he would have taken advantage of the chance to kill Henred.

"But I'm not a Martian, I'm a human." Which made a difference, at least to him.

From the corner of his eyes he again glimpsed the shadow he had seen and had forgotten. Again it was moving. And it was closer now. He could see it much more clearly, well enough to tell what it was.

He stared at it for a long time without quite believing what he was seeing.

The shadow was Nerissa.

Her face was clearly visible through an opening in the shrubbery. She was looking at him, beckoning to him to come near.

He had just seen her via the *uni projection*. Now he was seeing her hiding in the shrubbery. Which was the real Nerissa? Or was this face

apparently looking at him from the shrubbery a trap designed to lure him to his death?

Shield on his left arm, sword in his right hand, he strolled casually over to the bank of shrubs. Anyone watching him would not have known he was making a purposeful movement. When he reached the spot where she was hiding, he did not look down at her but seemed to be watching something far away.

"Jerry Utah?" She spoke in a whisper and he thought he heard it, but in this place of shadows and of phantoms who could be sure a whisper was real? Did he hear her whisper with his ears or with his mind?

Very casually, he extended a foot. His big toe, extending beyond the end of the sandal, touched warm, firm flesh. The girl hiding here was real! He felt his heart jump.

Astonishment on her face, she watched his foot recede. "Why did you do that?"

"Just a little test," he answered.

"But why should you test me?"

"Because I just talked to you and saw you in the *uni projection.*"

Wonder showed on her face. Behind the wonder came fear. "You did no such thing. I haven't used the projection. I've been right here watching you. What do you mean—You saw me in the projection?"

He told her what had happened. Without looking at her squarely and without lifting his voice above a whisper, he described the vision he had seen.

Her whisper vibrated with outrage. "That wasn't me, Jerry. That was Ulruk, projecting my image."

"Could he do that?"

"Of course he could. I just know a little about the *uni projection,* not enough for real control. Ulruk knows far more than I and he can do things I can't. Jerry, you don't think that I would have asked you to stab a sleeping friend?"

He took a deep breath. The air felt good in his lungs, suddenly the sickness was going away from his stomach. He was no longer quite so tired. "But why would Ulruk do this, what could he gain by it?" he questioned.

"He was trying to stir up trouble," the girl answered. "He urged you to stab your sleeping friend. But what if your friend was not asleep?"

"But—"

"Look at your friend," her terse whisper came. "Look for yourself and see if I am not right."

UTAH TURNED and glanced at Henred. The engineer was sitting up and was watching him. "Hello," Utah called. "How long had you been awake?"

"I've never been asleep." Henred answered. The engineer's voice took on a drawling note with overtones of satisfaction in it. "You've been acting so damned noble that I began to get suspicious of you, I wondered if you really meant it or were you trying to pull the wool over my eyes, to trick me into trusting you, so you could gain my confidence and then stab me in the back. So I pretended to go to sleep, but all the time I was watching you."

"You're sure a trusting soul!" Utah felt hot anger rise in him.

"Don't get hot about it," Henred answered comfortably. "I've run my test and I'm satisfied. You're actually one of those ring-tailed wonders that a man can trust all the way."

As the engineer spoke, anger went out of Jerry Utah. Inside of him was a good feeling, as if here somehow he had accomplished something important, something to make a man proud. No wonder the vision of Ne-

rissa, as projected by Ulruk, had seemed so startled at his refusal to stab Henred. Still without looking down, he spoke again to Nerissa.

"Why are you here?"

"I came to help you," the girl answered. "I came to show you a way out of here. We'll take another chance at reaching those hangars."

CHAPTER VII

HENRED AND Utah moved quietly across the vast amphitheater. Nerissa kept completely out of sight. Occasionally they caught glimpses of a bush shaking but the girl herself was never visible. "Why is she hiding so carefully?" Henred questioned.

"Because she doesn't want to be seen. If she is caught helping us again, it might be the end of her. And of us too."

"Do your really think we've got a chance to get out of here?" Sweat was visible on the engineer's face and his voice was shaky. "I mean—I doubt if I could take it if we fail again."

"If we fail, we won't have to take anything very long."

"But how is she going to get us out of here?"

"I don't know. She didn't say. But if she got in here, she can get out again. What's that?"

From some spot out of their sight came the sharp clang of metal striking metal. A voice cried out in pain. Then came a grunting sound. They moved toward the source of this disturbance.

In an open spot a Martian and a human were battling. "Kavish and Bywater," Utah whispered. Apparently the fight had been in progress for some time for both contestants were moving sluggishly and both had been wounded. Grass had been trampled, the sod was torn. Bywater's right side showed the mark of a sword thrust. Blood was flowing from a wound on Kavish's arm. Breathing heavily, the Martian was tottering on his feet.

Bywater moved forward, his sword lifted high. He knew nothing about sword fighting, his aim was to lift his sword and to bring it down on the head of his opponent, beating down all opposition.

Bywater's sword came down. Kavish dropped to one knee and thrust forward, his sword point grazing the edge of Bywater's shield. The point struck Bywater in the chest, penetrated until six inches of metal were visible behind the human's back.

Bywater had taken his death stroke. At the same time, his descending sword, incompletely parried by the shield, struck Kavish on the top of the head with the flat of the blade.

If the blow had been struck with the edge, the Martian would have been split apart down to his chin, but the flat of the blade only knocked him down.

Bywater fell, and died.

Kavish lay on the ground, either knocked unconscious by the blow or so badly wounded he could not rise again.

Utah's lips compressed in a thin knife line. He moved forward, Henred keeping pace with him. "Looks like your bread upon the waters did not include Sam Bywater," the tall engineer said.

Utah did not answer. As they approached, Kavish struggled to his feet. His sword point thrust into the ground, he stood leaning upon it, too weak to do more than stand, but glaring defiance at them just the same.

"All right, cut my throat!" His voice rang in a challenge to them.

"Why should we cut your throat, Kavish?" Jerry Utah asked.

"What?" Confusion showed in the Martian's eyes. It was a question he had not been anticipating and which he was not prepared to answer. "Because—" His gaze strayed to the body of Bywater on the ground.

"What happened?" Utah continued.

"He came upon me when I was asleep and tried to kill me."

The simple statement held a wealth of meaning. "And because Bywater did that, we are supposed to kill you?" Utah said.

"Well, he is of your race. Also, there is a struggle here, and the reward—" Kavish faltered.

"Maybe we're not much interested in the reward," Utah said. "Maybe, when Bywater tried to kill you when you slept, he forfeited his right to belong to our race."

Kavish did not begin to understand. "There was also the other, the Kelso Mead—"

"Mead had just struck down a priest who had done him no harm."

"After I have slain two members of your race, do you hold nothing against me?" the amazed Martian said.

"Nothing that requires your heart's blood in return. The code of the humans is different from the Martian code. I'm not saying our code is better. But some of us try to stick by it."

"You mean you are not going to slay me?" Kavish sounded as if he didn't believe anything he had heard, that all of this was some preposterous fantasy which existed in his mind.

"A part of our code is never to strike a man when he's down," the pilot answered.

"But the struggle here—and the reward."

"You can have all the reward, except the girl. We want our lives, and nothing else."

THEY MOVED off. "You're leaving a mighty confused Martian back there," Henred commented.

"I can't help it, I'm sort of confused myself."

"I suppose you know you are using the oldest-known survival technique—which is to make as many friends as you possibly can. Because someday some friend may be in a position to do you a favor, making friends increases the odds in your favor."

"Of course I know it. All I'm doing is giving us—and incidentally me—every possible chance to survive. Sure, we could have killed Kavish. Maybe that would have been the smart thing to do. But a dead Martian, while he will never hurt you, will also never help you."

"You're taking a long chance if you expect Kavish to help you," the engineer commented.

"I know. But we're in a desperate position and we have to take long chances. All the short chances have been used up."

Nerissa, keeping out of sight, was a shadow moving through the shrubbery. They took great care never to look directly at her. Leaning on his sword point, Kavish watched them leave. His face reflected consternation.

He had just seen something that neither he nor any other Martian had ever thought could happen—a defenseless enemy spared the edge of the grace knife. There was turmoil inside of him.

The two humans followed Nerissa to the farther wall of the arena. At the foot of a large tree half hidden behind a jungle growth of bamboo, she disappeared.

"The girl is gone," Henred whispered.

"I see she is. "We'll wait and see what happens."

In that hot silent smoky land there was no sound. No wind blew here,

no wind had ever blown here. This place had the damp and oppressive feeling of a vast hot-house, which is what it actually was. Jerry Utah could feel his heart beat begin to build up. He felt now like he usually did when he was warming up a new ship on the runway, preparing to blast free. At such moments, tension always began to creep up inside of him, a mild anxiety state, the medicos called this condition. The anxiety resulted from the fact that he did not know whether or not he was going to be alive five minutes after he pressed home the throttle, the mildness of that state rose from the fact that he was Jerry Utah, accustomed to facing death. There was a hidden factor in him which made the challenge of death a stimulant, lifting him to his best. If he had been anything else, deep inside, he would not have been a test pilot. Or not long.

They waited, Utah feeling the continued rise of his heart beat. On Henred's face, sweat began to appear in larger drops, a reflection of the way the anxiety state was building up inside him. Nerissa did not appear. Casually, going round-about, they made their way toward the tree where she had vanished. Several huge roots of the tree rose above the ground like the bones of some prehistoric monster buried here.

UNDER ONE of the roots was a hole big enough for a man to slide through. In this hole Nerissa's face was visible. Utah sat down on the root directly above her. "Okay, Nerissa," he whispered. "We'll wait until we think no one is watching, then we'll follow you."

She nodded.

Utah yawned. "Your turn to stand guard while I get some shuteye," he said to the engineer. "Sure, go ahead," Henred said. Utah laid down beside the root. So far as he could tell they were not being watched. Henred, leaning against the root, was silent. "There's nothing I can see, Jerry," the engineer whispered. Utah slid into the hole. Later, Henred followed.

Nerissa was a shadow waiting in darkness for them. "I found this place when I was a child. I used to slip into the arena to play—and to watch the fights there."

"Do you think we were seen?"

"I don't think so. This is the time when Ulruk usually rests."

Again they followed her through darkened tunnels where flaring torches occasionally marked the way, through the interior of this moon of Mars, dodging priests, watching and listening. Always they were listening. But the sound of the singing slaves did not appear behind them. No sound came.

"The hangars are near now," Nerissa whispered. "We will soon be there. Are you sure you can fly the ships?"

"I'll take that chance," the pilot answered.

"What—what is it like on Earth?" the girl questioned. "I have often watched it in the sky. I knew it was my home and I—I dreamed that some day I might go there."

"I'll show you what it's like, if once we get off this moon."

The girl was excited, for the first time a glow was on her face. It showed through the dirt and the dust. With a short sword firmly gripped in her hand, she looked like a warrior queen from the days of the Amazons.

"We will get away from this moon. Look, there is the hangar."

The tunnel widened before them. A glow of light appeared. The passage emerged forty feet above the hangar floor. A long twisting flight of steps led downward.

Below them, its blunt nose pointed upward, poised ready for flight, a Martian ship lay on the runway. A

blue-clad priest-mechanic was nonchalantly working with the fuel inlet pipe. The engines were not in operation. warming them would require a matter of two or three minutes. But the ship was there, ready to take off for Mars.

Beyond the end of the flight ramp, Jerry Utah caught a glimpse of a patch of washed-out blue—the sky, as seen through the thin atmosphere of Phobos. It was the most blessed sight he had ever seen.

"If we can once get inside that ship and get the doors locked, the blast of the motors warming up will keep every priest out of reach until we can take off," Henred said. The tall engineer had become wildly excited. His Adam's apple was jumping and the lines on his face were relaxing. "I can run the motors of that ship, I can run any motor that has a wheel to turn or a jet to blast. Come on, Jerry, here's where we move out of here!"

He stepped out of the tunnel and on to the little platform at the top of the steps, then stepped quickly back, a strangled cry on his lips, his face sagging and his eyes wild.

Jerry Utah, coming close behind him, saw what Henred had seen—and what had been hidden from their sight until they emerged on the landing. It had been hidden because it was almost directly beneath them.

Ulruk in his sedan chair borne by the singing slaves!

"That devil knew where we were all the time," Henred whispered. "He was playing with us, like a cat with mice. He let us come on—and all the time he was here waiting for us. Jerry, our goose is cooked!" A shrill hysterical note had crept into the voice of the engineer. For a moment, he had had a taste of freedom, of life itself, and then the taste had been snatched away from him.

Simultaneously, the chant of the singing slaves began to lift on the air!

BELOW THEM, Ulruk could be seen. He was looking upward, the light of devil's lamps glittering in his eyes. His fingers moved caressingly over the golden ball he carried.

The paralysis began to come.

As he felt the paralysis begin to reach invisible fingers toward him, touching him in a thousand places with hands of icy chill, Jerry Utah forced himself forward. His muscles responded reluctantly, in another minute, in another thirty seconds, perhaps in another ten seconds, they would cease entirely to respond, but during this fractional split instant of time while the radiation from the golden ball was taking effect, he could still move, sluggishly but enough to take a few steps.

He took these steps. Straight from the edge of the landing on the steps, he launched himself outward. Like dying Hamlet leaping down upon his murderous step-father, Jerry Utah launched himself outward and downward—straight toward Ulruk. There was in him at this moment something of the same feeling that must have motivated the prince of Denmark in that he was now beyond hope of life.

No matter what was the effect of the radiation pouring outward from the golden ball that Ulruk held, even if it paralyzed everyone within its reach except the singing slaves, who were immune to its effects, it could neither stop nor slow the plunge of a falling body.

The man who was falling downward might be paralyzed and unable to move but nothing could stop him from falling.

Jerry Utah hit on top of Ulruk, high priest of Mars. The impact of his body knocked the golden ball from Ulruk's hand. It fell to the floor

of the chair. Ulruk reached frantic fingers for it.

In the moment when the ball left Ulruk's hand, the paralysis that held Jerry Utah was broken. He could move again. And there never was a moment in his life when he couldn't move faster than the high priest of all Mars.

His sandal crashing down smashed the golden ball. It burst into two parts. Like the works from a smashed watch, out of it came a multitude of tiny coils and springs, microscopic switches, a spew of parts. Like miniature lightning blue sparks leaped from part to part. Utah felt the jolt of an electrical discharge in his leg. Smoke spurted from under his foot. He turned his foot, savagely, on the remnants of the golden ball.

The high priest had claimed that his ability to strike with paralysis all who opposed him was a phenomenom of his priesthood, a miracle that he could bring into existence because he was very near to the gods.

In this moment, it was a miracle that failed. When the golden ball was smashed, the radio control that flowed through it was broken.

The broken parts of the ball crunching under his heel, Jerry Utah pulled himself to his feet. Ulruk's hate-filled eyes glittered with vast surprise.

The chant of the singing slaves went into horrified silence. The whole hangar stood as if stunned, the slaves and the spearmen stared from startled, uncomprehending eyes at what was happening. Their high priest was in danger. This was a fact they could not instantly comprehend. They had always believed him to be beyond danger. They needed time to grasp this new idea that he could be in danger.

Utah lifted his sword. If he did nothing else in his life, he intended to drive this weapon clear up to the hilt in Ulruk's heart. With the high priest dead, this priestly hierarchy might fall for lack of a leader. Greater empires than this had fallen when their leader died.

Ulruk saw the lifted sword and knew the intention of the human behind it. If his slaves needed more time to think before they could grasp this new situation, he did not. He could think faster than they, could see what was about to happen.

It was not something that he wanted to happen.

He flung himself backward over the throne chair. For an instant, he looked like an over-grown monkey turning backward flip-flops as his body whirled through the air.

Utah's sword point rammed into the back of the throne chair. He cursed and yanked it free, leaped to the seat of the chair and looked over the back of it for the high priest.

"Kill him!" Ulruk, on the floor below, shouted to his spearmen.

CHAPTER VIII

JERRY UTAH spun just in time to see a spear thrusting upward at him and to catch it on his shield. A second spear was coming, the spearman thrusting with it like it was a pikestaff instead of throwing it. He slashed at it with his sword, servered the point from the shaft.

At least twenty of the spearmen were below. They were between him and the ship. To hurl himself at them would have the same result as a wild and savage tribesman driving himself at a Roman phalanx—he would die on the points of thrusting spears coming at him from all directions.

If he stayed where he was, the spears would also reach him.

"To hell with you devils!" His voice rose in a shout. If he had to

die here, he could at least show them how a human met his end. His yell was a scream of defiance that echoed back from the solid roof of stone overhead.

Like a gigantic bird falling, something came down in front of him, landing in the sedan chair. He jerked himself back from it, thinking he was being attacked from a new quarter. Then he saw that the falling "bird" was Henred. Released from paralysis with the crushing of the golden ball, the engineer had launched himself downward too.

From the platform of the sedan chair, two sword points faced the spearmen below. A spearman thrust upward. Utah reached out with a long arm and struck down. The spearman retreated howling, a useless arm dangling.

Henred grinned. "Two at a time, Jerry."

Two swords against twenty spears!

Then there were no longer two swords, but three. Nerissa came down from up above. But she missed her leap and went off the edge of the platform, sprawling to the stone floor below.

Utah and Henred went right behind her. She came quickly to her feet.

"Charge them!" Utah said. Where one man would have had no chance, two men and a woman might get through. "Straight toward the ship. Cut down anybody in the way."

They drove themselves straight at the disorganized spearmen. Spear points clashed on metal shields, gleaming blades turned red. Before their fierce onslaught, the spearmen broke. The three humans went through their ranks—and raced for the ship sitting with its nose pointed along the ramp that led to the far-off sky.

They made it. Utah shoved Nerissa and Henred through the open door, leaped through himself, slammed the door shut behind him, locked it, leaped toward the pilot's seat.

There was a grin on his face and a grin in his heart. He had his hands on the controls of a ship! It did not seem possible, it had never seemed possible. But it had happened! Outside was the sky. Outside was room to move in.

Far-off in the distance, hanging in the sky like a great balloon, was the planet Mars. Its thin tracery of canals was visible to the naked eye. The red deserts were sprawling blotches across the landscape.

Mars, freedom, safety! His shout was a burst of triumph in the control room. He snapped the switches that started the drive.

And nothing happened.

Henred's long finger pointing at the instrument panel was a signboard pointed the way to death.

"The fuel gauge, Jerry!" The engineer's voice was a husky, cracked whisper that had no resemblance to the voice of a living man. "They emptied the tanks before we got here. They knew we wanted a ship. They set this one here on the runway as bait for us, set it here with empty tanks!"

"Great God in Heaven!" Utah's voice was a prayer, a plea. Fiercely he jammed the palm of his hand against the instrument panel, thinking that the gauge might be merely stuck. The red needle quivered, but did not move beyond the empty mark.

"She's empty, Jerry. And there's nothing we can do about it. And—look!"

Across the hangar, from a door, a line of blue-clad priests was emerging at a trot.

"The mop-up squad," Henred said. "They'll pry us out of here like sardines out of a can."

"Can you hide us somewhere?" Utah spoke to Nerissa.

"For a little while, maybe, I can hide you someplace."

"Then come on, before those priests get here."

SHOVING open the door of the ship, the three leaped out. They had fought like fools to reach this ship, now they were being forced to leave it. Fierce shouts sounded from the priests as they were sighted.

As fast as they could run, they fled across the cavern and into the nearest tunnel. The priests charged after them. Ulruk had disappeared.

"They'll find us if all they have left to hunt for are our bones," Henred panted. "There won't be a cockroach with an undisturbed nest on this whole moon, before they get through hunting for us."

"I've got one more idea," Jerry Utah answered. He spoke to the girl. "Can you take us to the heart of the moon?"

"I think so. But—why."

H told them why. They listened, the girl wonderingly, Henred with doubt and apprehension and despair mingling on his face. "My God, Jerry, what an idea!" the engineer blurted out.

"Can you think of a better one?"

"My idea-tank ran dry long ago."

"Then we'll try my idea. If it works, fine. If it fails—what have we got to lose?"

"But you may pull the whole moon to pieces," the engineer protested.

"As I said before—what have we got to lose?" Utah answered. He didn't think his idea would work. He didn't think anything would work any more. But what did they have to lose, except their lives, and those were already lost.

They moved forward again. Behind them, they could hear the priests searching. The Martians were having trouble in the maze of dark tunnels but they were like a pack of hounds hot on the scent of prey. Every priest on the whole moon would soon be hunting for them.

Nerissa, leading the way, stopped abruptly. Ahead of them was a wall torch. Grouped under it were six armed priests.

"Road block," Henred whispered. "End of the trail, end of the line, everybody out."

"Is there a way around them?" Utah spoke to Nerissa.

She shook her head. "We'll have to go back. They haven't seen us yet." Turning, she stopped. The sounds coming along the tunnel told them that the priests were close behind them, too near for them to turn back.

"I said this was the end of the line," Henred spoke. He laughed again, at some secret joke that he alone knew.

"I guess you're right," Jerry Utah answered. Down the tunnel, he caught a glimpse of light where a torch was held aloft. The priests searching for them. He tried to estimate their numbers. At least eight or ten Martians were there.

The priests were coming along the tunnel but they were being cautious about it.

"Do we want to tackle six Martians or do we want to tackle ten?" Utah said softly.

"Eh?" Henred questioned. Then he understood what Utah meant. He laughed. "Six, of course. Better odds that way."

OUT OF the darkness, the three humans came upon the six priests huddled under the torch like three small but very violent tornados erupting out of a fog. Their hope—it was a small hope—was to cut the enemy down to their size in the first charge, then to drive on through them.

Two priests went down when the humans hit them, one dropped his sword and ran. But three stood firm.

Steel clashed on steel, a sword leaped out, the point was defected downward by a shield or by another blade. Henred grumbled something. Out of the corner of his eyes, Jerry Utah caught a glimpse of the engineer. A sword point had caught Henred's forehead and his face was a mass of blood. The engineer's lips moved to form words. *"Morituri—"*

The ancient salute of the gladiators!

"To hell with that *morituri* stuff!" Utah grunted. Yet he knew the engineer was right. They, who were about to die— This was a fight that could not last long, he tried to estimate how long he could endure physically, then had no time to wonder about such things. Two of the priests had ganged up on him. They ignored Nerissa. While one fiercely attacked the pilot from the front, the second began a circling motion.

Nerissa darted toward the one who was circling—and slipped and fell on the bloody floor. The priest kicked at her contemptuously. Jerry Utah lunged at the one in front of him, lunging with the point of the sword like it was a lance held in a rest. Perhaps this was not the way to fight with swords, perhaps this violated Martian custom, he neither knew nor cared. He had no time to find a better way.

The hard-driven sword point went into the belly of the priest, was rammed home there. As the priest fell, he struck at the sword, then reached out, grabbed Utah and took the human down with him.

Utah was vaguely aware that the priest who had circled him was lunging at his back. He caught a quick glimpse of what happened. From the floor, Nerissa extended a slim foot—and tripped the lunging priest.

The Martian hit the floor flat on his face, all the fight knocked out of him. Utah got quickly to his feet. Henred had pinned his priest against the wall.

The fight here was over.

"Thanks, Nerissa. He would have run that sword all the way through me if you hadn't tripped him."

She scrambled to her feet. All three were desperately winded. Pursuit was coming along the tunnel. Tired and winded or not, they had to move on. They stumbled past the spot where the priests had set up a road block and moved on into the darkness.

Ahead of them, under another torch, another Martian stood, on guard.

"Only one? Hell, we can take him," Utah grunted. In his heart, he knew he was lying. He could barely stand. Henred's labored breathing told him the engineer was in little better shape. Nerissa, panting, was near exhaustion. The three of them were no match for even one Martian.

But they had to take him.

They moved slowly forward.

"That fellow looks familiar to me," Henred whispered.

Utah strained his eyes to see what Henred had distinguished. "Hell on wheels!" he muttered.

The Martian was Kavish. He had escaped from the arena too, and somehow he had managed to follow them here.

"Still trying to win, I suppose." Henred spoke. "He couldn't have picked a better time."

"All we can do is to go in on him," Jerry Utah said.

THEY WENT forward slowly, two very tired men and one very tired woman, the men clad like gladiators and bloodier than any gladiators had ever been in the Coliseum of Imperial Rome.

Kavish heard them coming. "Who comes?" he called. His voice was tight with strong overtones of emotion in it.

"We come!" Jerry Utah answered.

The single sword point and the single shield menaced them as they advanced.

They came into the circle of light case downward from the torch.

As they advanced, Kavish very slowly lowered his sword point so that it rested on the rocky floor in front of him. He stood leaning on it, silently regarding them. He had been standing in this same position when last they had seen him in the arena.

Kavish stood there staring at them. He made no move to lift his sword.

"What's the answer?" Utah spoke, in Martian. He felt a gulp form in his throat. Deep in his heart he suspected he knew the answer, and if his suspicion was true, here was taking place a greater miracle than had ever happened on the whole Red Planet.

Kavish did not answer. His face moved as he swallowed. His face was the face of a wolf that has seen a dog and is wondering what it is like to be tame.

"I followed you from the arena," his words came slowly. "When you slipped through the hole, I came after you."

They said nothing.

"I was watching when Ulruk used what we Martians call the *dragnal druth* on you, the god-striker that stops movement. All our lives we have been taught that this *dragnal druth* is a power of the gods that is given to the high priest to use. I saw you crush the golden ball that is the symbol of the *dragnal druth*. Pah!" He spat out the exclamation.

Disgust and bitterness showed on the face of this wild wolf who was trying to become at least partly tame. "I say again—pah! The *dragnal druth* is no god-power, it is a trick. and we Martians have been lied to. we have been held in slavery, in worse than slavery, by our beliefs!"

His voice faltered. This was sacrilege, from his viewpoint, this was the rankest of heresy. But he was working hard to become something he had not been, he was wrestling with an idea, a big idea. His voice came again, stronger now.

"And this whole moon, which we have been taught is a sacred place, our holy of holies, is nothing but a fake and a fraud, and a stench in the nostrils of honest Martians!"

Again his voice went into silence. Something moved on his face. Very subtly his features changed. Little by little, the look of the wolf began to go away.

"I have been looking for you." His voice rose harsh and hard and bitter in the narrow tunnel but full of resolution. "From now on, humans, I fight on your side."

The point of his weapon came away from the floor—and swept upward in the Martian sword salute.

They answered it in kind.

Noises came from behind them.

"Blundering fools follow you down this tunnel," Kavish spoke. "I will lead them astray. Do you find a haven somewhere—I will soon join you again."

He moved around them and past them. Soon they heard his voice behind them. He was talking to the Martian priests searching for them, telling them loudly that no humans were in this tunnel, urging them to hurry in the other direction. A palaver followed. The foot-steps of the priests could be heard—dying away into the distance.

Then single soft footsteps came toward them. It was Kavish returning after he had sent the priests away.

"You once said something about bread—" Henred spoke. Then he could go no farther. His voice choked into silence.

"Sometimes it doesn't come back." Jerry Utah said huskily. "Sometimes it does. This time it came back. When it comes back, the result is worth all the failures."

Kavish was there with them, grinning, asking them where they went next, what was to be done. They told them. Then the four of them, three humans and one Martian, slid away into the dark maze of tunnels that wound their way through the interior of Phobos, the inner moon of Mars.

CHAPTER IX

ULRUK, high priest of all Mars, fleeing hastily from the hangars on foot—which was the first time any of the priesthood had ever seen him travel in any way except in his ornate sedan chair—went first to his own quarters. There, hidden away, was another of the golden balls that hid the equipment of the *dragnal druth,* the powerful radiation which paralyzed those against whom it was directed. Not until he had this golden ball in his hands did the high priest really feel safe. Then he began to summon his temple hierarchy and his slaves, to hear his orders.

Time was needed to get the hierarchy and the slaves together. There was vast confusion on this moon. Rumors were flying thick and fast. Each priest had some new tale of something that had happened or was about to happen. And every priest was scared. Something new had happened here, custom had been broken, heresy walked abroad. So the gathering was slow and even the lash of the high priest's anger could not drive his underlings faster.

Ulruk was frightened. He could not remember when he had been so badly frightened, certainly not in the arena, when he had entered the lists and had competed for the prize so long ago. He hadn't been scared then, not really scared, for he had had the *dragnal druth* with him even then, with the result that it had been easy to slay his opponents.

When your enemy can neither flee nor resist you, slaying him is not difficult. But if he hadn't been scared then, Ulruk was scared now. And with fear came hate. What he would do to these human vermin when he caught them, what he would do to Nerissa, that traitorous girl who had dared to help them! Never again would a human being be allowed on this moon, not even as a child. Even when you took them as children, they seemed to retain some lingering memory of their own kind, some strange loyalty to their own race. Nerissa had never seen a man until men had been brought here, but the instant she had seen a man, she had betrayed the kind priests who had raised her from a child. At the thought of that betrayal, savage bitterness rose in Ulruk. You couldn't trust a human! You just couldn't do it.

More than two zonars had passed before Ulruk got everything in order, his sedan chair recovered, and his singing slaves reassembled.

The humans, he knew, were hiding somewhere in the tunnels of this moon. He would find them! The hangars were heavily guarded, they could not steal a sky-ship and escape. Though they might run like rats from hiding place to hiding place for many zonars, the end result was inevitable.

WITH GREAT pomp and dignity, Ulruk took his seat in the sedan chair. The slaves knelt, the spearmen likewise. This was decreed by tradition and by custom.

"Slaves, shoulder chair!" Ulruk ordered. It struck him at the moment that his voice did not sound quite as loud and as clear as ordinary. He dis-

missed it as of no importance, in fact, he scarcely noticed this odd little effect.

But he did notice that the slaves seemed to have trouble in lifting the chair.

"Weaklings! Get this chair on your shoulders and move along."

Under the lash of his voice, they hastily lifted the chair.

"Begin chant," he ordered.

Their voices lifted but again came that strange effect. The chorus seemed thin and somehow distant. A sudden thought struck Ulruk. No, this could not be true! He dismissed the idea from his mind.

"Move faster, you!"

The slaves tried. He could see they were trying. But they were having trouble in carrying the chair. He tried to compose himself to use the *uni projection* to locate the hidden humans. The projection would not help much, he knew, since he did not know where the rats were hiding.

The slaves sang. Their voices were thin and distant, not easily heard. And they were sweating. Ulruk stared at them. Inside his mind consternation was growing. It was appearing on his face in the form of horror. The slaves had never sweated before, this chair was not a heavy burden. Why should they sweat now?

One slave stumbled.

Seeing the slave stumble, a spearman moved instantly. Custom decreed what should happen now. It happened. The spearman drove his weapon straight through the slave's body.

The slaves who carried the sedan chair of the high priest were not supposed to stumble. This was considered to be sacrilege. Ulruk motioned to the spearman to take the place of the writhing slave who lay dying.

The spear bearer slid his shoulder under the lifting rail of the sedan chair.

And three slaves stumbled. Where the floor was perfectly smooth, they stumbled and went down, dragging the others with them. The chair crunched heavily to the floor. Ulruk was thrown from it.

The spearman stared aghast at the luckless slaves who had committed this act. They started forward, to carry out what custom decreed. Ulruk, with a gesture, stopped them. Now for the first time, Ulruk was beginning to realize how much actual difficulty he was having in breathing. His chest was laboring. He could feel sweat gathering on his body. It didn't seem he could get enough air into his lungs to breathe.

"What—what's happening—to air?" he mumbled.

The spearmen were showing signs of distress. Ulruk could see their chests rising and falling, could hear the sounds of their labored breathing. One spearman had let the point of his weapon sink to the floor and he was leaning on it as if he did not have the strength to stand alone.

Inside Ulruk's mind consternation was growing again. The suspicion that he had forced down inside him was rising, like a monster, to the surface.

A yellow-hooded priest came stumbling into the room. He was panting as if his laboring lungs were about to collapse. His gait was a shambling run as if his legs could not hold him erect.

It was no trouble for this priest to prostrate himself before Ulruk. He sprawled forward on the stone floor.

"Great One—" His gasped whisper was a thin sound in the shocked and silent room. "The humans are in the rooms—where the air and gravity machines—are located...." The priest gasped out the words, then ceased gasping. Yellow sweat that matched the color of his hood appeared in globules on his face, his

eyes took on a fixed stare, he tried to lift himself on his hands—and fell. Inside of him something had run out of energy.

In this moment Ulruk knew the truth. He knew now what had happened, why the chant of the slaves had seemed thin and distant, why his own voice had sounded strange.

Grasping the golden ball of the *dragnal druth,* Ulruk pulled himself erect.

The slaves helped him. Or tried to. But they were in trouble too. One of them went down, then another. Finally Ulruk himself went down.

There was no one left to help him. He was alone, alone with all that he had been but was no longer. He began to crawl. All-powerful high-priest of Mars, he had been, now he was a crawling skeleton trying to find the strength to drag himself to the core of the moon.

He clutched the *dragnal druth.* If he could only reach the core of the moon with it!

His chest heaved, he panted for breath, saliva drooled from his lips, he looked like a cornered cur gone rabid from hydrophobia. Only the hate in his eyes was still alive.

Even after he could no longer move his body, the hate was still alive in his eyes, like a glittering yellow flame. Then, little by little, like twin yellow candles burning themselves out in their own juice, the lights went out in his eyes.

Thus died Ulruk, high priest of all Mars. The golden ball rolled from his fingers and came to rest against the wall.

THE LITTLE moon groaned as it turned slowly on its axis. Vast forces, greater than the forces of tidal waves, seethed through it. As the force of the artificial gravity generated the heart of the moon began to lessen, pressures that had been built up against it began to collapse. Here and there roofs fell and walls collapsed. The moon was being tortured and it wailed and groaned like an animal in pain.

In the core of the moon, in the big power room located there, Jerry Utah listened to the groaning and the grumbling in the roof above him. "Like Samson, we may pull down the walls of the temple," he muttered.

"To hell with 'em, let 'em come down," Henred answered. The tall engineer was having himself a time. Over and over again he was repeating: "I can run any power plant that has a wheel to turn or a jet to thrust. I can even run this damned perversion of a power plant." He was not at all sure of the way this power plant functioned, or of what was happening to the energy derived from it, but he knew for certain that the plant was running down, that it was generating less energy, by the simple fact that he was getting lighter on his feet all the time as the pull of gravity lessened.

Air was moving out of the interior of the moon as the artificial gravity field began to collapse upon it. Air moved slowly through the maze of tunnels and passages, seeking outlets. Here and there projections formed vibrating surfaces, becoming in effect, vast organ reeds, so that the whole moon vibrated with various loud howling noises, like a tremendous organ badly out of tune.

"Don't let the air pressure get down too low or we'll be cooked too," Jerry Utah warned.

"Don't you worry. I'm making this monster eat right out of my hand," Henred answered.

The air would linger longest here and as long as they kept the artificial gravity on even part way, they would have oxygen. Perhaps it would be thin air but it would sustain life. Jerry

Utah didn't let himself think of what was happening elsewhere on Phobos, as air and life left the moon. Near him on the floor was the body of a dead priest, a member of the working crew who had not escaped when they charged this room.

Perhaps this priest had been lucky.

"Here they come!" Kavish, on watch at the door, yelled. The Martian stood at the peephole looking out.

The first charge of the priests, while hastily organized, had power in it. They charged the door. It was made of stout metal and it resisted. The humans, entering, had not broken this door in getting in. Kavish had secured the opening of the door, by marching boldly up to it and demanding entrance.

When the first wave of priests charged the door and found it did not budge, they remained outside for a few minutes, yelling their rage and their hatred. They didn't yell long. Very soon they began to realize that the air was going away.

As the first attack subsided, and other priests put in an appearance, they gathered outside the door. First they were an angry, threatening mob who promised the humans inside what would happen when Ulruk arrived. When time passed and the high priest did not arrive, they ceased being threatening. Their anger began to go away. Fear was replacing it.

"We'll die here," a yellow-hooded priest wailed. "We'll smother."

"Smother, you good-for-nothing rascals!" Kavish yelled. He did not call them rascals. The term he used was strictly Martian and it covered their ancestry in precise detail back for ten generations. "Where is Ulruk?"

There was no answer. No one knew where Ulruk was. And no one cared, now. Every priest out there knew it was too late for the high priest to help them.

Mingled with the creaks and grumbles from the moon itself, and with the shrill screams of the out-of-tune organ pipes, were the wails of the priests. They were begging now, for air, for mercy, for life itself.

"Let 'em learn what it feels like," Jerry Utah said. "When they've learned, we'll give them air—and more gravity to hold the air. And when we leave this moon—Kavish, would you like to stay behind?"

"Stay behind!" The Martian was startled. "They would cut my throat!"

"Not if the situation was handled right. And before we leave you we will make certain that it is handled right. I imagine Ulruk is certainly dead by now and—" He hesitated.

"And what?" Kavish said.

"If you could take Ulruk's place, if you could become high priest of all Mars, what would you do?"

Kavish's eyes began to glow. "If I were high priest, brother, there would be some changes made on Mars." The tone of his voice indicated he meant exactly what he said. The glint in his eyes showed what the changes would be. "I would wipe out this whole priesthood and start all over again—"

Jerry Utah sighed. "Turn up the juice," he called to Henred. "We've got a new world here in the making."

MANY ZONARS later, a little scene took place in the main hangar of the moon. The ship that had been on the ramp was still there, but it was fueled now, by hustling priests who looked as if they had risen from the dead—and were greatly surprised to find themselves alive again. They were taking orders from a new high priest who was backing up his orders with the holy religious symbol, the *dragnal druth,* which had been found near Ulruk's body and brought to the

new high priest, as a symbol of his authority.

In essence, the whole situation meant a new deal here on Phobos, a great many changes made and to be made, by an exceedingly angry and disgusted new high priest, one Kavish. And because of the changes made here, there would be a new deal on all Mars. Which would be all to the good.

The ship's motors were warm, Utah was at the controls. Henred, like some old and wary hawk, was watching the instrument panel and muttering with satisfaction at the position of the meters and at the sound of the warming motors.

Outside the ship, well away from the zone of blast, Kavish was waving and grinning at them.

"Come back soon," he was yelling. "Come back soon—and be always welcome here."

Jerry Utah grinned. He waved his hand in the ancient gesture of parting and pressed home the throttle. The motors roared. The ship went up the runway, gathered speed, and hurled itself into the clear sky.

Below lay Mars, a mighty red balloon in the sky. Utah turned to the girl sitting beside him. "There is Mars. And off there—" he pointed to a stellar body barely visible. "—is Earth. Home."

The girl was smiling, he saw. Her eyes were shining with bright and eager lights. Earth—home—where she had never been. Earth was calling her home just as it was calling Jerry Utah and Harry Henred.

Earth—Earth—the green planet across space. Earth—Home—

On Jerry Utah's face a grin appeared, a reflection of the vast feeling moving inside of him. "Earth and home." The whispered words were a paen of victory in his heart.

THE END

THE GOLDEN SHIELD

By H. R. STANTON

HISTORIANS of the future—the long distant future—are going to find it difficult to understand just why we Americans so venerated the precious yellow metal we call gold. They'll wonder why we collected it all in one place and buried it deep into the ground behind a monstrous facade of steel and concrete. Perhaps they'll have economic historians who might be able to explain the matter, but it seems so silly even to us—that it's hard to imagine what they'll think.

On the other hand, maybe that vast horde of gold won't be at Fort Knox. Perhaps it will actually be put to work! This almost inconceivable state has in fact already suggested itself. Recently the custodians of the gold released some of it to be used in a scientific experiment!

Navy researchers have been doing some important work in cosmic ray research in the Rocky Mountains. They needed for their particular purposes some sort of a material which would serve as a radiation shield more effective than the conventional lead. Furthermore gold causes the mysterious cosmic ray particles to "shower" or break up into other particles rather easily. The Navy made application to the Treasury Department which kindly released some two hundred thousand dollars worth of the precious yellow metal. But it only did so after the Navy deposited an equivelant check!

When the experiment was completed the gold was returned. A mere two dollars and twenty-five cents worth was missing. This represents the slight amount of material lost in machining the gold bricks into flat plates.

This experiment is reminiscent of the Treasury Department releasing large amounts of silver for use as electrical bus-bars or conductors during the wire to take the place of rare copper. Is it barely possible that gold and silver may turn into really useful metals instead of lying buried hundreds of feet beneath the ground?

★ ★ ★

OVERGROWN HELL-BOMB

By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

A NUMBER of American scientists are advancing the views that the hydrogen bomb is as antiquated as the battleship—even before it's built! This startling attitude is backed up with some pretty sound reasoning which can't be ignored. Just because the H-bomb is bigger, they say, doesn't mean it's better. And in fact they suggest that constructing it might be harmful!

The atomic bomb is an enormously destructive weapon as it is. It is apparent that a few hundred or a thousand such atomic bombs could do incalcuable damage to a potential enemy—say, the Soviet Union. But there are a limited number of targets to saturate-bomb in this way. We have more than enough bomb to do it.

What then, the scientists ask, is the purpose in making a super-bomb, the Hydrogen bomb, which may have ten times the destructiveness—but only in a given area? Is it good sense they ask, to use an elephant gun to kill a mosquito? Would you sink a rowboat with a battleship?

These questions are logical especially when they're backed with the knowledge that the development of a hydrogen bomb can be enormously costly and consuming of our industrial effort. In this latter case they explain that the hydrogen bomb is really an uneconomical way to utilize atomic energy even in warfare.

Such reasoning, it seems to us, is valid as far as it goes. But it fails to take into account another factor that the future may bring. Through the technology and construction of hydrogen bombs, a great deal may be learned about atomic processes. This was true of the atomic bomb. It seems logical to suspect that it may be true of the hell-bomb too.

Regardless of the views being advanced by one group or the other it seems that the hydrogen bomb is going to be manufactured. Because the Soviet Union is at work on it means that we must also get to work. Let's hope that it never has to be used, but should that sad case occur, we'll be prepared to counter with equally effective weapons of our own.

★ ★ ★

BEYOND PLUTO'S ORBIT

By SANDY MILLER

FOUR BILLION miles from the Sun, lonely Pluto makes its slow and majestic way around the border of the Solar System. In these far reaches of interplanetary space nothing passes save Pluto and an occasional comet. At least that's what we've always thought.

But from the astronomical journal *Sternwelt* (Star-World) an astronomer suggests that we may be in error. Karl Schuette is a comet specialist whose prime work has been concerned with tracing the path of and predicting the goings and comings of, comets. Of course his basic material is the actual observational data of the arrival and departure of these celestial chariots. But it is possible to (and necessary) to construct mathematical pictures of their orbits in order to understand just how far out they go in their elliptical paths. And since these comet paths are strongly influenced by the masses and distances of the planets they pass near to, it is apparent that a great deal can be learned of the location of planets by considering comet paths.

Schuette has observed five Plutonian comets, Tuttle-Swift, Barnard, Grigg-Mellish, Mellish and Rigollet. Carefully he's compared their theoretical with their actual paths and has come to some startling conclusions. The predicted and observed paths do not agree!

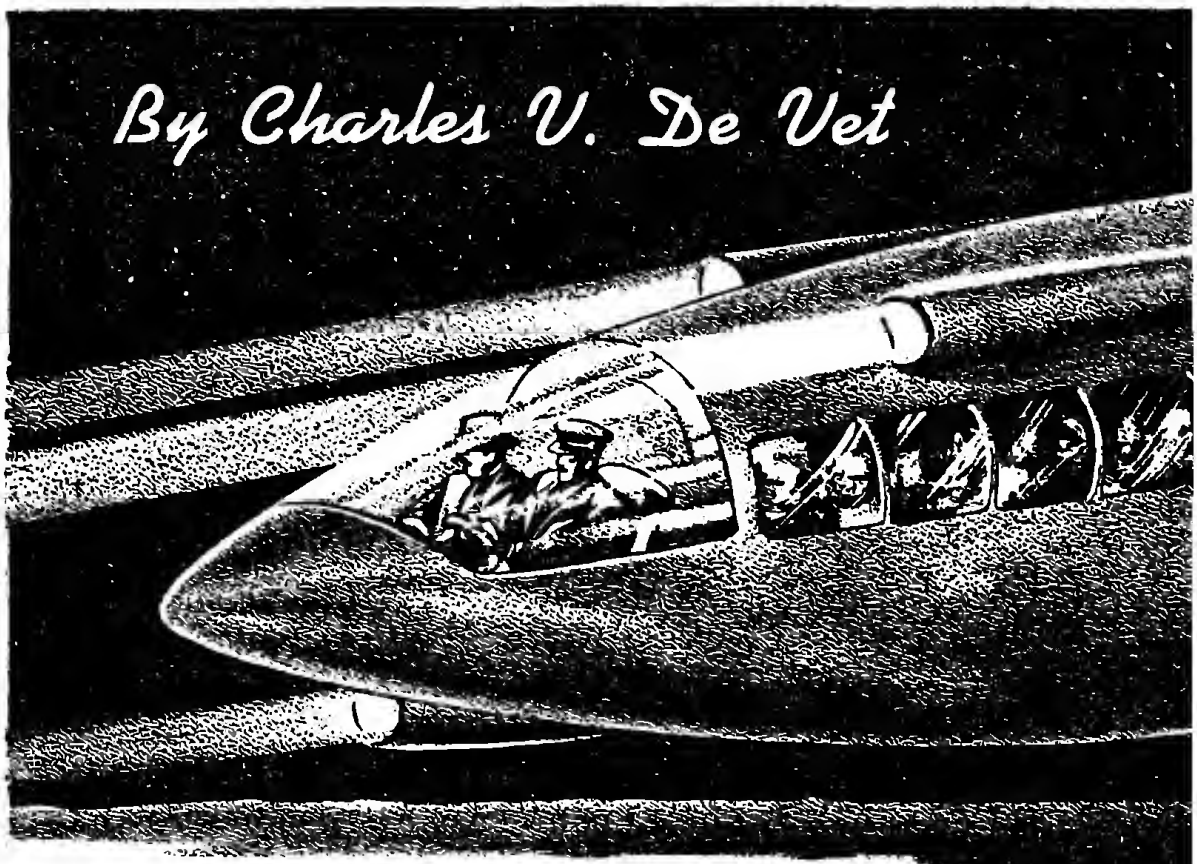
Assuming there is no error in calculation, what can this mean? It means simply that there is some other body influencing the comets with a strong gravitational field—and of course this body must be another planet!

This hypothetical trans-Plutonian planet is judged to lie about seven billion miles out from the Sun, far into the depths of space, far beyond even Pluto's icy, lonely course. In spite of the knowledge of gravitational deflections, the position and path of the trans-Plutonian planet can't be given. Only a careful search, plus a good deal of luck will show this shy wanderer up—and maybe not even then, for if its density is high and its diameter small, it is possible that it may never be seen. But that doesn't mean it does not exist.

Discovery and sight of the limiting planet may have to wait until men penetrate space, but it will come. There is also the chance that astronomical observation from a superior observatory like, say, the Moon, will also show it up.

★ ★ ★

By Charles V. De Vet



The Disciples' control was absolute to the point where only a superman could end its rule of tyranny. That meant using

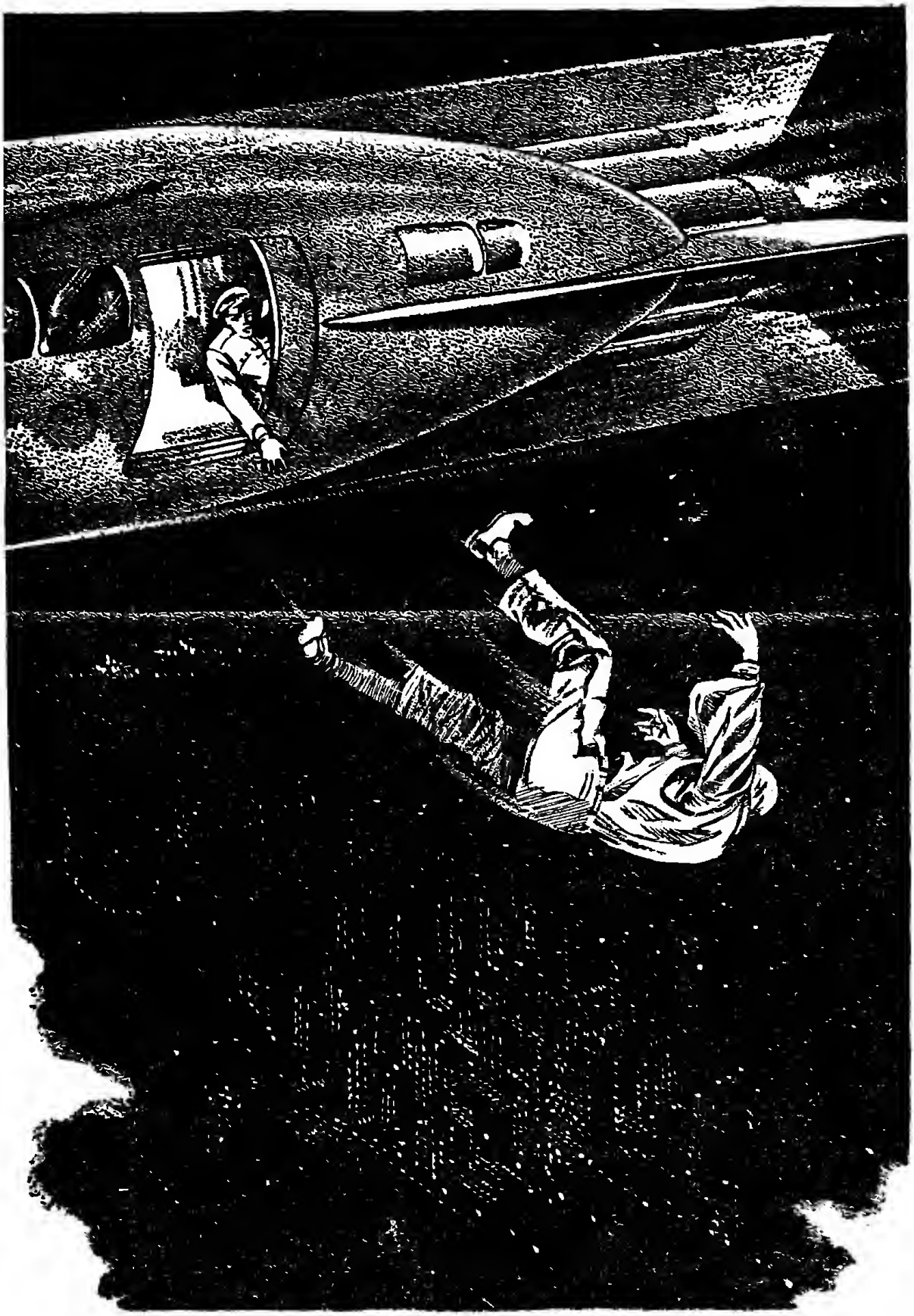
The Unexpected Weapon

WHEN THE waiter demanded five dalls for the drinks Larre knew he was being overcharged. They had unerringly spotted him as a newcomer to the big city.

"Do you like me?" the girl with him asked. The blood-purple iridescence of her hair, cascading to the soft white of her smoothly rounded shoulders, stirred strange emotions. Her eyes, either through some secret of artificial pigmentation or some chameleon-like quality, were star-shaped pools of liquid, purple fire, that completed the almost other-worldly effect augmenting her natural beauty.

"You're lovely," Larre gasped. And he meant it, until he remembered suddenly that she was—

"I have a half hour before my next number," she said. "Would you like to have me show you the gambling



rooms upstairs?" The illusion, the spell of her presence, shattered.

"Thanks. No," Larre said, almost harshly.

"Then, perhaps you'd better buy me another drink." Her lips dipped in a pert, impersonally intimate smile. She signalled the waiter, taking his acceptance for granted. "I have to keep the management happy or I can't stay with you."

The second drink came. Larre raised his glass, pausing while he watched her lift hers to her lips of purple satin. He saw the cruel selfishness hidden under that coating of lipstick. He wanted to get out into the air, away from her. He drained his glass quickly, started to rise, then sat down to get out the money to pay for the drinks. That second drink had tasted slightly different than the first. Was it possible that....

He shook his head to clear his blurring vision. The face across the small table from him faded until only the purple lips stood out from a vague blot of soft white. He closed his eyes to shut it out, and fell forward. He heard the tinkling sound of breaking glass on the floor. Then he was falling into a bottomless blackness.

"—ANOTHER bloody exploratory trip." The words beat their way through the wall blocking his consciousness.

"Probably half of us will never come back," said a second, deeper voice.

Larre remained quiet, listening to the conversation around him. "—three year trip." "In some leaky old spacer." "—half blind." "So dangerous they have to kidnap a crew." Gradually he realized what had happened. Shanghaied....

He couldn't let them hold him. For twenty years Gramp had trained him, then sent him to the city to test what he had been taught and to fight the unholy Disciples. But how could he fight them when he did not even know who they were? Of only one thing he was certain: Those years must not be wasted!

Gramp had warned him not to use his special mind power any oftener than necessary. He'd have to use it now if he wanted to get free.

For five minutes he lay still, concentrating deeply. He was ready. "A doctor—, a doctor—," he mumbled through parched lips. "Ditis." He coughed.

Suddenly it was deathly still on all sides of him. Then "A Ditis!" The voice was half hysterical. Men scrambled to get away. Yells, "Ditis! Ditis! Ditis!"

He heard someone coming down the aisle. A light flashed in his eyes. His face was swollen and red. Dull blue splotches showed through the redness.

"Put on gloves and get him out of here."

"We're in for trouble," Larre heard one of the men who carried his stretcher say. "The boss gave us special orders to guard this fellow."

"You guard him then," grunted the other. "I'd rather be in trouble than dead. There's a cure for trouble, but not for ditis."

"Not me," said the first. "Let's dump him right here."

A moment later Larre lay in an alley. Alone. By the smell and the looks of the dilapidated buildings, he judged he was somewhere in the Flats section of the city. His mauve nylon shirt and trousers were filthy with dirt, and his wide silver belt was gone but already his body was back to normal. He dusted himself off and headed for the street.

"I'd better not go back to my room in the Sailors Rest," he thought, fingering his hidden pocket to make certain he still had money. "Someone

from the bar in the back might recognize me."

He remembered there had been a Travellers' Aid in the depot. He'd inquire about getting a room in a private home.

At the entrance to the depot he stopped to watch a ball of fire float down the street, burst and spell out the words, "EAT ZESTOS."

* * *

The next few days Larre remained close to his room. He ordered a news dispenser, paid his subscription for two weeks, and settled down to study the reports. He would be able to understand the complexities of the city better by following the types than by personal investigation. Also it was safer. But the third day he had absorbed a vast fund of understanding. He learned more about the city in those few days than he had in the other twenty-two years of his life.

His first step, he decided, would be to find a job. He would be less conspicuous as a working man. Gramp had suggested that he try to get employment working for the city. That would give him a good vantage point for observation.

"CONGRATULATIONS," said the Director of Civil Service. "While I am not authorized to reveal your exact mark, I feel free to tell you that it is high enough to qualify you for one of our better positions."

"I'm glad to hear that, sir," answered Larre.

"Of course you realize," Director Warner continued, "that the written test is merely a part of the criteria by which we judge the fitness of the applicant for the position. This personal interview forms another, and perhaps more significant, basis for judgment. I might say that, in the final analysis, the recommendations I make largely determine the placement of the aspirant."

Was this official just a stuffed shirt being officious and magnanimous? Larre wondered. Or was he leading up to something?

"I was under the impression that the written exam was important."

"Officially yes. Actually no. I might confess that my recommendations are regarded so highly, as much for my connections as for my ability."

"When will I know just what your decision is?" Larre asked.

"I will come to that shortly. These connections which I mention, are maintained only at a high cost. My salary alone would hardly cover the actual expense."

"Do you mean there's graft?"

"A harsh word, lad. Let us say there are all-around expenses involved which can most equitably be charged to the persons receiving the benefit of our services."

"Meaning the applicants," said Larre. "Including myself?"

"To be frank," the Director confided, "yes."

"How much would I be expected to pay?"

"That depends a great deal upon the position desired. For instance I have an opening for a park supervisor, paying four hundred dalls a month, for which I would be glad to report you favorably, upon the payment of a thousand dalls."

"To speak as frankly as you have," said Larre, rising, "I regard you as a dirty grafter. I would as soon throw my money away as to give it to you."

Only by a slight clenching of his jaw muscles did the Director betray his anger as he pressed the buzzer.

"This person has obviously cheated on his exam," Warner said to his receptionist, who entered at his ring. "Mark his record to that effect. Explain to him his avenue of recourse, if he wishes it, and dismiss him. That

is all."

"Yes sir," her voice was a bit higher than normal, but as sweet as her smile.

Did he imagine it, Larre wondered, or had she given him a slight wink as she turned?

In the outer office Larre asked, "What is this avenue of recourse, which he mentioned?"

"You may file your possible protest with the Civil Service Board." Her face had lost the impersonal politeness with which she had greeted him when he entered. "Confidentially, you'd be wasting your time. They're all his men. Tough, but that's the way it is."

He made an effort to keep the conversation going. He wished he could ask her for a date. "In other words I'm all through as far as city employment is concerned?"

"Unless you want to file an indigent's application. You'd get work then, but you wouldn't like it. You're treated like dirt, and they only pay four dalls a day."

She wouldn't go out with him anyway, he thought. Probably she was laughing at him even now. But she was so lovely, and she seemed so young, and so nice. "Thanks, but I'll pass it up—for now at least." He just didn't have the nerve to ask her what he wanted to.

"I'll be through work in ten minutes," she said. It should have sounded bold, but it didn't. "Would you care to wait for me downstairs?"

Larre flushed slightly, with surprise and just a shade of embarrassment. "I could ask for nothing better."

With his feet never seeming to touch the mastic tile of the floor, Larre walked from the office.

BACK IN the Director's office the sweet faced receptionist asked, "How did he do?"

"A percentile of one hundred, Marguery," Warner answered. "The top."

"How did he react when you offered to sell him a job?" Marguery asked.

The Director smiled ruefully. "He threw it in my face."

"I expected as much," said Marguery.

As she returned to her receptionist's desk she murmured, "Now we'll put him through his paces."

Making sure that he was alone and unheard, the Director picked up the perma-phone. He adjusted the tiny clip to the lobe of his ear, set the headpiece firmly against his cheek and thought his call number.

"Contact." The voice that answered carried authority.

"Give me the Police Commissioner, please."

"Speaking."

"This is Warner, Director of Civil Service, Commissioner Gorman. I've found your man!"

"Good work!"

* * *

She tucked her gray gloved hand under his arm as though they had been old friends. In a clothier's window, a life-like mechanical man kept pace with them, tipped his hat, and brushed a fanciful bit of lint from the sleeve of his coat.

Larre laughed apologetically as she saw him watching the animated dummy.

"Those advertisements are so eye-catching they're a nuisance," she said. She smiled, and the day was bright though shadows had fallen.

"Do you mind if I ask you a question?" she queried.

"Not at all."

"You're a stranger to New City, aren't you?"

"Is it so obvious?" Why did he feel that he had known her for a long time, when he was positive that he had

never seen her before today?

"It's good to see someone without the blase look of most of the city people. Is this your first day in town?"

"The fourth." He wanted to talk to her, to keep firm the bond that had sprung up between them. "I stayed at the Sailors Rest the first night."

"Oh oh. Trouble?"

"Plenty. I was abducted by some government space runners. I managed to get away all right, but I thought I'd better not go back."

"You were wise."

For a time they walked in silence. "Have you had dinner?" she asked.

"Not yet. Would you take pity on a country bumpkin and dine with me?"

She smiled. "I know a nice girl isn't supposed to invite a man up to her apartment. At least not on such short acquaintance. But I would like to cook a meal for you; one that you would probably enjoy more than any we could get in a cateraunt."

"That sounds like manna from heaven to me."

"Will you still believe me when I tell you that I really am a nice girl, and treat me like one?" She seemed almost sorry that she had asked him to come.

"You know I will, or you wouldn't have invited me," Larre teased. "Lead on, fairy princess."

They laughed together and now she was no longer quite so shy.

"We'll pass up the cab stand and take a brown-car on the next corner," she said. "We won't be gyped there."

THEY HAD eaten, and Larre had found Marguery to be as good a cook as she was beautiful. To him that beauty grew greater every moment. She had laughed with him, and sang to him. She was a happy, delightful companion. She loved life, every small event was an adventure.

"So your grandfather never told you what your ultimate assignment was to be?" she asked. She looked so fresh and young in her white house robe.

"No," Larre replied. "He said that I'd have to prove first that I was capable. I'm afraid that so far he'd be very disappointed."

"No, he wouldn't, Larre. He very probably knows just what you have to compete with in this graft-ridden city. You aren't giving up, are you?" Her blue eyes, contrasting with her dark hair and fair skin, gave her an intriguing Celtic loveliness.

"Not at all. But your invitation was more of a god-send than you can ever know."

"You were homesick?" It was more of a statement than a question. "Poor Larre." She put her hand in his. "Come on into the front room and sit down with me."

The living room was tiny, but it expressed Marguery. Teel green furniture, inexpensive but tastefully blending with the aqua walls, was delicately gay, but restful.

"I know how you felt," she said, "I cried every night for two weeks when I first came to the city. And I lived with my aunt then."

"It wasn't too bad," he disclaimed, "I just wasn't accustomed to being alone."

She was close to him. He caught her sweet woman scent and he wanted to kiss her. But he knew she wouldn't like that—not yet.

"Why don't you try to get in with one of the big private companies?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm not licked yet. Not by a long ways. I've been thinking of the Companies. I also thought of trying my hand at some business where I could free-lance."

"You're very intelligent, aren't you? Don't be conventionally modest now. I

want to know."

"Gramp seemed to think that I was exceptional," Larre answered after a moment's hesitation.

"That's what I thought," Marguery said. "I have a friend employed by the Rubber Company, who works in personnel. Would you like me to call him tomorrow and have him arrange an interview for you?"

He could only stare at her in silent wonder...

* * *

As he walked into the towering office building of the Rubber Company, Larre whistled. Today he had drawn his first week's salary, the only money he had ever earned. Gramp, and the Disciples, had been relegated to the realm of problems of the dim future.

Today was his alone and all signs pointed upward. To culminate his happiness he had been notified that the Big Boss, himself, wanted to see him that very afternoon.

Larre had been surprised to receive the call. Carle Rezab was the owner as well as president. His company was one of the six that controlled the bulk of the industrial output of the entire hemisphere.

"Mr. King," the President began, with no preliminaries, "I'm delighted with the results you have shown in the short time you have been with us."

"Thank you, sir," Larre replied.

"Not at all. If you are free this evening," the President continued, "I'd like to have you accompany me to my club. This may seem a bit precipitous but you can be assured I have my very good reasons. Will you be available?"

THAT EVENING Larre set his hat on the waiting tray at the check room. The action triggered the camera which took his picture for identification when he returned. He followed Rezab into the club rooms.

"Two of the usual, Josef," Rezab said to the taciturn steward who served them.

As they drank, Larre looked about the magnificently furnished room. A stereographic vision master covered all the four walls and gave them the appearance of open, wooded countryside. He watched a stag come bounding from the colored forest and run for its life as a pack of wolves followed in full cry. It completed the circle of the room before it was brought to bay and went down fighting beneath the snarling gray bodies of the killers.

Through a wide doorway he could see well-dressed gentlemen dancing with their ladies in a haze of blue rolling shadows. Larre knew the effects color could have on a man's emotions. He wondered if the scented atmosphere was not lightly drugged also. His feeling of well-being was a bit too high. He was pleased at the reflected respect accorded him as a friend of Rezab's.

His employer invited a giant of a man with white bushy hair to join them. After a short time Rezab excused himself and walked over to the neon lighted bar. The lights were cleverly arranged to make the bar appear as a pile of birch logs topped by a fierce flame.

Slowly an inner tension built up within him and Larre knew the time had again come when he must use the training Gramp had given him.

He let his highly developed intuitive sense send out an aura of light contact. The impressions it brought back were clear and definite. Danger!

The danger localized and focused in the persons of two men: Rezab; and Josef, the cold, unsmiling steward.

When the two men met at the far side of the room and began to talk, Larre was ready for them. He sank

lower in his chair and, while one part of his mind conversed with his companion, another mental tentacle leaped out and probed into the consciousness of the man known as Josef. This was always a tremendous drain on his vitality but it was necessary.

He paused there for only a moment. Josef possessed one of those unreadable "murky" minds which he found in approximately one man in four. Quickly he swung over to Rezab. He could follow the conversation just as easily there. The lust, and the greed for power which he read repelled him.

"Then he is not a Disciple?" asked Rezab.

"No."

"I was certain that he was one of us," said Rezab. "Are you positive that he isn't?"

"There can be no slightest doubt," answered Josef. "We gave him several of the approaches. He would have acknowledged them."

"That's the way I figured it originally," Rezab replied, reflectively. "I decided to bring him here and let you make more conclusive tests."

"The x-ray plates show that there is no metal anywhere in his head," said Josef.

"Perhaps he has the plate concealed in a metal filling in a tooth."

"His teeth are all intact."

"Did you x-ray his spinal column, for a double check, as I told you?"

"Yes. Nothing there, either," said Josef.

"Would it be possible that the brain has been operated on in some way to eliminate the need of the plate?" asked Rezab.

"Impossible! Unless—." For the first time Josef's face showed emotion—apprehension. "Unless there's been some new discovery by a surgeon greater than Mobob."

"That must be it," Rezab said. "We know the limitations of the normal mind. No natural mind could similate ditis like he did to escape from the clutches of—."

So they knew about that!

"And he couldn't operate on himself," Josef said dryly. "That means—"

Larre saw the two men gaze at each other, their eyes troubled.

"It means that he's not our only threat," Rezab said. "If we killed him we might lose a chance to find and eliminate a greater danger than he presents."

Larre knew a moment of panic. Whatever else happened they must never get to Gramp through him.

"Keep him here for another hour and I'll find out all you want to know," said Josef.

"There are more things under heaven and earth, Horatio," Larre murmured under his breath. He closed his eyes and concentrated deeply. When he opened them he was standing on the sidewalk in front of the club! The mind reading and teleportation, as usual, had left him weak and spent. One knee threatened to buckle as he walked hurriedly away. He hoped they wouldn't understand how he had done it.

BACK IN his room Larre changed clothes quietly: changed into a suit which he had never worn.

Standing before a full length mirror in his lave he studied his features quizzically. Slowly the skin on the bridge of his nose drew back, shortening it into a slight pug, and forming several wrinkles at the base of the forehead. Other wrinkles formed crow's feet at the corners of his eyes. His mouth lengthened and drooped slightly at the ends. A moment later his wavy hair began to straighten and soon lay flat against his head. Finally, his spine curved, shortening his height

by a full inch.

When he walked into the lobby of the Hotel Lowry he had added twenty years to his age.

He paid a week's rent at the desk and rode the elevator to the eighty-first floor. In his room he relaxed for the first time that night. He ate the meal which he had ordered sent up, and then slept soundly, for ten hours.

* * *

Larre awoke to the slow throbbing of his intuition. Faint but steady. He lay quietly and let his mind spread out a fine net of seeking tentative web. Nothing!

When he was certain that the danger was not imminent, he dismissed the feeling and turned to his more immediate problem. He had to find out more about Rezab and the men associated with him.

Vaguely he recalled an item about Warner which he had read in Rezab's thoughts. It had been a fleeting impression which told him nothing. Where did the Director figure in this set-up? Lacking any other leads, Larre decided, he'd better investigate that immediately.

This would probably be his last chance for leisurely investigation. The next time he clashed with the Disciples he would have to have all possible data collected and be prepared to move fast. Fighting them was likely to be quite a job for one man.

Before he left his room Larre mentally photographed every object in it. If they searched it while he was gone, he would read signs of it when he returned.

Larre wrote his second examination under the name of Otto G. Rudd. Once again he faced the Director.

"I'm happy to say—," while Warner talked, the probing tentacle quested. In the Director's mind he found only shallowness: He was mentally a small man concerned with petty graft, money, and position.

When Warner asked for his bribe a flood of information poured forth. He paid off to Gorman, Police Commissioner. Gorman was under the domination of—Mobob. The Disciples were under Mobob. The Disciples controlled the country. They owned the Companies and ran the government, either by direct office holding or by influence. And through the machinations of these men, the people suffered. They were tied up in graft, extorted by monopolies, and moved like pawns by this selfish tyranny.

Once, as though half forgotten, a new name entered: Pariseau. Pariseau seemed to be synonymous with Mobob. And, just before the end of the interview, the perma-phone whispered. As he answered the Director wondered if it would be Josef!

WHEN Larre left the Civil Service building he did not go down to the ground walks but rode the outside perambulator on the second level. It carried him along at a slow, window-shopping rate of speed.

He needed to concentrate, he decided. To solve the problem of safety as well as how to whip the Disciples. He had to bring together all the various threads of the enigma: To form them into one solid whole, to be weighed and considered.

He came to the front of a large pastel blue GAMES PALACE, blazing with the lighted words, *"Come in with a tib. Walk out a millionaire!*

To give himself the relaxation necessary to clear thought, he decided to go in and try one of the Bank games. Sometimes he could do his best thinking while playing.

The place thronged with players and spectators. These people did not take their games casually. Rather, a tension gripped both the men and women grouped about the boards. The

players were grim and intent on their scores. Facial expressions only, betraying the emotions of the onlookers.

Larre stepped over to one of the vacant alleys, dropped his tib into the coin slot, and placed the five fingers of his right hand into the holes of the black measurement board. When he had an adjustment which he considered satisfactory, he squeezed and a regulation sixteen pound Bank bowling ball dropped into the waiting rack.

Sighting carefully down the left fork of the prone Y, Larre released the ball. It travelled swiftly down the alley and into the main stem of the Y. Bounding off the hard rubber backboard of the base, at a slight angle, it came rolling back up the runway. It entered the right fork of the Y and knocked down three of the ten plastic pins standing there.

Soon the spirit of the game gripped him and he was oblivious to all else about him. His tib had bought the customary ten frames of game count. The automatic score keeper gave him a count in each square totaling the number of pins he was able to knock down in three balls. If he succeeded in knocking down all the pins in two attempts, he received a count of ten and was given an additional free frame. Knocking all the pins down with one ball entitled him to two free frames.

Overhead the pari-mutuel board posted the high scores for the entire city and the amounts paid for besting each score. High for the last twenty-four hour period was 271 and paid four hundred six dalls. High for the week, 302, paid fifteen hundred two dalls. On up to the all-time record nigh of 990, the bettering of which paid one million dalls!

The thought that the poorest man could win a million dalls with the investment of a mere tib was too compelling a lure for many men to resist. This it was that bred the fever in the players, and supported the thousands of PALACES throughout the city.

By the eighth frame Larre had mastered the mathematics of the alley and was playing with cold logical precision.

Not until he had run up ten strikes in succession did he become aware that he had an audience, intent, fascinated at his run. This would never do. The last thing he wanted was to attract attention. His eager watchers sighed when he blew the next frame. He rolled one more strike, three spares, and went out of the game on the next open frame.

His total of 287 gave him the new high for the day and he collected his pool which had grown to four hundred twenty-one dalls.

Not wanting to attract attention by too hasty a departure, he stepped into an adjoining barber shop for a hair-cut. He sat in one of the empty chairs and the clipper case settled down softly about his head. He deposited his dall, pressed the type-24 button, and the automatics began their operation.

All this while his subconcious mind had been doing its unfelt, undirected analyzing. Three minutes after he sat down his hair-cut was complete and so, also, was one part of the work of his subconscious. He knew the identity of Mobob!

LARRE returned to his room to find that nothing had been moved.

Stepping to the electrical directory he dialed M-o-b-o-b. He received the whining "no such person" signal.

Pariseau, the directory informed him, had disappeared twenty years before and had not been heard from since. He was presumed to be dead. He had been a brilliant brain surgeon, and renowned for his studies of the mind. This confirmed his earlier conclusion as to who Mobob was. He now had the WHO. He wished he knew the WHY.

That left two possibilities to investigate Gorman and Josef.

But first he must find out what it

was that troubled his intuition. All day the warning had throbbed, like a dull toothache. To disregard it further would be folly.

While he let water run into his tub, he stripped. Slowly. Keeping relaxed. Gingerly he inched his way into the steaming bath. Finally he lay immersed to the muscular slope of the shoulders where they joined the neck. His muscles lost all tenseness, his mind forgot its problems and rested, as free of thought and extraneous impressions as it is possible for the vital organ to be.

Now a steady soundless ticking registered. His life force beat and ebbed in tune with the soundless melody itself. He followed the continuous wave of ticks out of his room, through the walls of the building, until it was lost in the distance. He had solved its riddle!

Some variation of a radar beam had been attuned to the pattern of his pulse emanations and it followed him wherever he went. It must have been set in concordance with him when he was at the club.

A new respect for the Disciples had come with the discovery. For a moment he knew uncertainty.

He quickly shrugged off the feeling. He'd have to return to the club. Only there could he throw the beam out of pattern. This must be done at any cost. If the Disciples knew where he was at all times, he would be practically powerless.

With the resolution to return came a feeling of joy. The kind of joy men feel when about to join in battle with the enemy. Some trepidation, yes, but joy that the uncertainty and waiting would be over.

The realization came that now he would get somewhere. They didn't—couldn't—suspect his full powers. He could play them while they tried to play him, and unearth the rest of the unholy Disciples. It would do no good to eliminate one or two if the others remained unknown.

THE INSCRUTABLE Josef greeted him impassively on his return to the club. How he wished he could read that man's mind.

"Is Mr. Rezab here, Josef?"

"Not at the present moment, Mr. King. However, he told me to expect you."

"He did?"

"Yes sir. He asked me to have you wait in one of the private rooms. He is due any minute."

They walked up three steps and through a mirrored dining room. A beautiful red haired organist played softly on an organ harp.

Once in the private conference room Josef led him to an over-stuffed chair and left. Larre settled back comfortably but kept every sense keen. He did not have long to wait before they closed with him in another conflict of wits.

His first intimation of alarm came with the realization that the chair in which he sat was no ordinary chair. At first he was not quite sure what was wrong about it. Then his tense, expectant body felt a series of thin minute vibrations. Tiny muscles in the follicles of his epidermis caused the downy hairs on his arms to straighten.

His sensitive fingers examined the fabric in the chair. He thought he could feel fine wires, deeply buried. He tried to move the chair but it was bolted to the floor.

He lifted the lumiline lamp on the end table at his elbow and found a second, smaller wire following the electric outlet.

Larre wondered what their game was this time. He'd play along with them for awhile to find out.

Directly ahead of him a tinted

screen reflected the light into thousands of little splashes of color, and at the same time gave back his own image, handsome but mottled by the lights and too strained for his own satisfaction.

Only he would have spotted it: Two of the pin-pricks of light never changed!

Quickly he shifted to a new ecology of sensation. From behind the screen he received three impressions: Josef. Rezab. And a machine, that made the lights, which was studying him.

Maintaining a sharp external vigilance, he concentrated on the lights. First one blinked out. Then the other.

Shortly afterward Rezab walked into the room.

"Sorry to be late, Larre."

"The apologies are all mine, for not waiting to be invited before coming." Larre determined to play along with Rezab's simulated friendliness.

"Not at all. You're always welcome here."

"Thank you." Larre admired the man's coolness.

"I'm going to lay my cards on the table, Larre," said Rezab. "We want you on our side. Also, we want your, shall we say—mentor?"

"Why?"

"You're both too potentially dangerous for us to allow you not to be on our side."

"What if I refuse?"

"You'd be foolhardy." Rezab's voice had not raised the slightest, but it echoed the strength and relentlessness behind it. "Besides, we have much to offer you. Position. Money. Just name your price."

"How would I know that I could trust you?"

"I'll prove it to you in any way you ask."

"Start by telling me about yourself," Larre tested him. "And who is Mobob?"

"Mobob," said Rezab, "is, or was, our non-titular head. His real name was Pariseau. At the time of his disappearance, twenty years ago, he was the head of National Medical University."

"What was his connection with you?"

"We, the Disciples, I believe we're known as, were selected students of his. He trained us to run the country. After our training we were each operated on by him. He inserted stainless plates in our brains. These plates cut off all our baser emotions; our jealousy, hatred, fear, and," here his voice again took on its ruthless tinge, "misdirected compassion. I believe he made us as nearly perfect governing instruments as is humanly possible."

"What were you doing, a short while ago, behind that screen?" asked Larre. For just a moment he was afraid that he had given away one of his hidden abilities.

REZAB hesitated for a moment, but seemed to miss the allusion as he replied, "I believe my answer to that question will prove my sincerity. We were trying to read your mind with a secret machine recorder. We weren't too successful because of its limitations. We can only ask it questions while it is in operation. It blinks a green light for YES, and a red light for NO. Also, you shorted it too quickly." They had figured that part out with amazing speed and certainty.

"Incidentally," continued Rezab, "your handling of that machine is a good demonstration of why we want you with us."

Strangely enough, Larre saw that Rezab, himself, believed what he was saying, except for one thing: Death loomed for him and for Gramp. Death for him immediately if he did not

agree. Behind the curtain on the wall he sensed that Josef aimed a pistol at his heart.

"Give me a minute to think," said Larre.

He concentrated on the radar beam that covered him and efficiently propelled an explosive charge along its waves that burned out every wire in its case.

He teleported to the sidewalk in front of the club. Fervently he wished that he were not limited to so short a range.

As he walked quickly up the block, he realized that a man walked directly behind him. His heart beat faster as a second man joined the first. Ahead walked a third. Across the street were several more. This time they had been prepared for him.

When the first spasm of fear gripped his stomach he was pleased that it was not a restricting fear, or one of panic. Rather it acted as an alarm which gave a greater sharpness to his nerves; brought more blood to his muscles, readying them for conflict or for flight. His reflexes would all be faster because of that fear.

In two quick teleports he placed two city blocks between him and the lodge. He was not surprised to find men around him each time. They surrounded him but made no attempt to stop or harm him.

In the streets mobiles cruised slowly, and overhead he saw lights where others hovered. The chase was on! Could he lose them? The teleports took up too much energy to be used much more.

At the first L station he entered a brown-car with the blue streak that designated high lane traffic. Two men followed him into the vehicle.

AS THE omnibus rose into the thousand yard lane, Larre walked up into the next to the top compartment and seated himself in the middle of a center row of seats. His two shadows took up positions four rows back.

On either side of the brown-car Larre could see the orange lights of mobiles which flanked the public vehicle and kept pace with it. The net was still tight.

Out of his eidetic memory Larre drew the map of the city. The next L Station was situated side by side with the hub of one of the pneumatic tube "wheels". There would be his chance.

The brown-car reached its station, descended to the ground, and discharged a dozen passengers. It rose back into its traffic lane and headed for the next station. As it left the light and entered the darkness of the night, Larre rose and started for the upper, open deck. From the corner of his eye he saw his two pursuers rise and follow him.

When he was out of their sight on the stairway, he ran. He did not stop on the upper deck, but vaulted over the railing and into the darkness.

For over eight hundred feet he fell at the normal speed of a dropping object. One hundred and twelve feet from the ground his body substance registered its trained metastasis and it began to fight gravity. Thirty-two feet later his velocity had been cut in half. Sixteen feet from the ground it had been halved again. His speed steadily decreased.

He landed running. A quick dash of two hundred yards brought him to the pneumatic tube station. He dropped a two-tib coin into the fare box, entered a waiting tube, and sank down into a deeply cushioned seat.

The door of the capsule locked shut and they were off. Larre flattened against the cushions. As his seat slid slowly backward, its base plunger, riding through a metal container of thick oil with a small escape outlet, absorbed most of the force of the initial mo-

mentum.

In an unbelievably short time the express covered the two hundred-odd miles to the edge of the city. Larre stepped out, walked into the shadow of the nearest building, and teleported. A block away he boarded a "ground-brown" which angled in, toward the center of the city. When it had gone thirty-three blocks, he alighted.

He walked back a few paces to the small hotel he had spotted, and registered. In his room he lay back on his bed, weak from reaction. If he hadn't thrown them off the trail yet, then he was licked!

FOR THE next two days he was a tired, discouraged man: Lassitude, followed by melancholia. Hardly more than a boy he had spent his energy with a reckless prodigality. His vitality had ebbed to a dangerous margin of safety. He was exhausted to the point of sickness, bodily and mentally. Had the Disciples found him then he could have offered little resistance.

Alternately he slept and ate. During his waking hours, between meals, he munched endless bars of chocolate. Gradually his strength returned. However, even the normality of body failed to dispel his doubt as to his ability to handle the job before him.

During this rest period he reviewed many of the aspects of his twenty-two years of existence. He recalled the long periods of intensive training, which should have been toilsome, but which had been fascinating pleasure. Gramp had taken full advantage of the facile mind and the memory which never forgot. Larre's mental resources had grown and developed. He would not let these men he was facing crush him with the sense of their power, he decided.

However, he realized that they were adult, experienced, and ruthless. He was pitting his untried talents against all this, plus effective organization and the backing of the legal aspects of society.

He knew now the immensity of the task he had to perform. He weighed himself in the balance and found himself wanting. He must have help. But from whom?

His first thought, of course, was Gramp. But he would never risk Gramp's life unless all else failed. He was close to that failure now but not quite there.

His biggest handicap, as he saw it, was the law. The Disciples could kill him and, with their control of the police and the courts, never fear punishment. On the other hand, if he were to kill one of them, even in self-defense, the giant structure of the law would be added to the list of his enemies.

Once again he turned to the news reports. He was fortunate in finding an article on city administration before much examination of the sheets. The directory gave him what further information he needed.

Vern Pagel, he read, had been elected Governor of New City on a reform ticket. During his six months in office he had closed many of the city's worse crime spots. All known aspects of his past life were beyond reproach. Here might be the man who could give him the help he needed.

If he could convince Pagel to deputize him, to give him the backing of the Governor's office, Larre felt he could fight the Disciples on more even terms. A man who governed one hundred million people would surely know about the Disciples and the menace they presented. Perhaps Pagel would welcome help from someone who had the weapons to fight them.

WHEN LARRE walked into the Governor's private office he immediately knew he had made a mistake. He quickly read in the Governor's

mind that not only was he a Disciple, but that he knew who Larre was.

Nevertheless Larre had prepared for just such a contingency. Instantly he snapped his mind into the double teleport for which he had set himself. He switched into the hallway and back into the second stage of his teleport, so quickly that he appeared as only a half-imagined blur to the lone guard patrolling the long, high domed passageway. The second half of the charge would bring him to the steps of the office building.

Before he reached the steps a great ball of fiery agony burst in his body and he landed on the steps a loose, inert bundle. His consciousness fought to retain control, but his mind could not bear the anguish of his twitching, pain-seared body and it sank into insensibility.

He awoke to find himself gazing into the Governor's face with its customary half smile, half leer, which was oddly attractive. Behind him stood three plain clothes guards with leveled pistols.

"King," said Pagel, "you know the information we want. You'll give it to us, or never leave this room alive."

Time. Into Larre's mind flashed the old proverb about puny man fighting relentless time from birth to death. Never winning. He had to have time.

"You've given me quite a mental and physical beating," Larre said, keeping his voice calm only by the strength of an iron will. "Can I have a few hours to recuperate? I don't believe I could answer your questions correctly now, if I tried."

"Certainly." The Governor was a man of brilliant intellect. He gave quick decisions. "It is now fourteen o'clock. I'll return at nineteen. For your information I might add that you were knocked out when you teleported through the steel wall of this building. It has been charged with electricity. We suspected that that would stop you. Incidentally the walls of this room are similarly charged. Except that the voltage is lethal."

They had him. No doubt about it this time. *Gramp, I hope I never have need to regret this, Larre prayed, but I need you now.*

DISREGARDING the two guards who had been left to watch him, he lay back on his couch and closed his eyes. Channeling every iota of concentration into the thought in his mind, he sent out a powerful, vital arm of telepathic energy. *Gramp! Gramp! Gramp!*

They had never tried it before when separated this far. Strong and clear came the reply. "Yes, Larre?"

"I'm in trouble, Gramp. Bad trouble." He felt better already. Always when he was little; when he was hurt or frightened, he had gone to Gramp. He had been Gramp's Chum, and Gramp had never failed him. He wouldn't now.

"The Disciples?" Gramp asked.

"Yes," Larre replied. "The Governor of New City has me a prisoner in the City Office Building."

"It's all my fault." Gramp sounded distressed. "I should never have let you go alone. But I didn't think they'd find you out."

"Why didn't you tell me more about them, before you sent me here?"

"I couldn't. They have mind reading machines, and I thought if they contacted you, you'd have a better chance if they saw that you weren't after them—in fact, knew nothing of importance about them."

"Didn't you send me here to fight them?" Larre was still puzzled.

"No," Gramp answered. "Not yet. I just wanted you to get the feel of the city, and to see how the Disciples ran everything—how evil they were. Later we would have fought them—to-

gether."

"I had trouble with them from the first. Not knowing who the Mobob was, made it even harder for me to fight them."

"You know now, don't you?" Gramp's voice was wistful, a little sad.

"Yes."

"Well, Larre," Gramp was his usual efficient self again. "Our only immediate concern is to get you free. I think I can do it. There's just one precaution that I can give you. Get all the rest you can. When the time comes, be ready to think and move—fast!"

"I'll be ready."

"If we succeed," Gramp said, "come home immediately. Together we can whip them. Goodbye for now, Chum."

Larre imagined the tendons in his forelegs as limp strings, lying loose and relaxed. Then his thighs. His arms lost their tension next. Finally his body rested quietly. His breathing became slow and regular. He slept.

THE GOVERNOR shook his shoulder. "Time's up. To state it bluntly—talk. Or die!"

Only one man accompanied him this time. With startled recognition Larre saw that it was Josef. These men certainly moved fast. An organization like that was going to be hard to cope with.

Quickly Larre scanned the Governor's mind, read his intentions, and prepared to deal with this new menace. He tensed, every sense alert and ready to spring into action. Before answering, he hopefully swung his probe over to Josef. Surprisingly he could read the thoughts there. He relaxed.

"The answer is, no," he said quietly.

"We're beyond the stage of arguing." The Governor spoke over his shoulder. "Josef, you know what to do."

"I certainly do," said Josef. He drew a wicked looking little splat gun, aimed with the same motion, and fired.

The bullet cut a short furrow through his hair before burying itself in the Governor's skull!

"You're a remarkable man, Josef," Larre said. "Gramp sent you, didn't he?"

"Of course," Josef never used two words where one would do.

"What do we do next?" Larre asked.

"How we get out of here is your problem." Josef glared as though Larre asked a stupid question. "I've done my part."

"Can't we just walk out?" Larre asked.

"Do you think the Governor was a fool? His men have orders to shoot you the moment you appear. With or without him."

"Can you turn off the current in these walls?"

"No."

"Just a minute," Larre swung around to look down at the dead administrator. When he turned back to Josef his face, feature for feature matched that of the Governor. Even to the quirked half smile. "Will this do?"

Josef showed not the slightest astonishment. "Change clothes with him."

Out in the street Marguery sat at the driving wheel of the waiting mobile.

Larre was beyond surprise now. "Home, Madam Chauffeur," he said lightly.

"THERE'S just one thing I don't understand," said Larre. "If you're the Mobob, why are you trying to destroy the Disciples?"

"I created them to do good," said Gramp. "But I failed. Then they got too powerful for me to control. I had literally loosed Frankenstein monsters into the world."

"What went wrong?"

"In the first place other emotions, good ones, like love, were victims of the operations. Also their desire for power seemed to take on the force of the amputated emotions. They turned greedy for power—avaricious."

"Why didn't you block off this greed for power also," Larre asked, still not clearly understanding Gramp's original plan.

"Without that desire they'd have been useless tools," Gramp explained. "They'd have been good, yes, but worthless as leaders."

"And they had to be leaders?"

"Yes." Seeming to draw from a half forgotten memory, Gramp continued. "I believed as did Plato, that the best government is one composed of the fittest men, chosen and trained for their positions. Men, not a part of the mass, but better than those they governed."

"Don't you believe now, that democracy is the best, workable government?" Larre asked.

"I'm convinced of that," answered Gramp. "But at the time, the obviously unworthy men, who so often won office, sickened me."

"Where does Marguery fit into this set-up?"

"Marguery and Josef," said Gramp, "are members of an under-cover organization which I set up to combat the Disciples. Josef acted as a counter agent."

"What about Warner, Director of Civil Service?"

"Nothing but an opportunist," said Gramp, waving his hand in dismissal, "playing both sides of the fence."

"And you aren't really my grandfather?" asked Larre.

"I sought you out, adopted you, and trained you to the best of my ability. You, Chum, are my ace in the hole. And," Gramp went on, "I believe you are ready for your task, difficult as it will be."

"I have a plan I want you to listen to," said Larre. "I'd like to send a message, signed by you, to every Disciple, ordering them to report for removal of their mental plates."

"They'd refuse, of course," said Gramp.

that the penalty for failure to obey will be death," answered Larre. "We'll

"Yes. However, we'll let them know tell them that the Governor was the first on the list. A date will be given as the deadline for each to report."

"That still won't be convincing," answered Gramp. "We're dealing with mature, intelligent men. They'd quickly suspect that we were taking advantage of the occasion of a provident death."

"I agree with you," said Larre. But —I'm sure that one more death, forecasted now, will convince them. Who, in your opinion, is the Disciple most deserving of death?"

"There is no doubt about it," Gramp hesitated not an instant, "James Kronholm, Secretary of State. He's not only basically evil, but I'm positive that he is even now maneuvering to plunge us into war with the Western Confederacy."

"Then put him first on the list to report. He'll refuse, and we can kill him with a clear conscience. After that I think each of the others will see to it that he reports before his name comes up on the list."

"So do I, Larre." Gramp's eyes lit up with pleasant anticipation. "I believe you've hit on the solution."

"I'm glad to hear that, from you. Now, can I have a few men from Marguery's organization for a particularly dangerous part of this plan of ours?"

"Why not take Marguery?" Gramp smiled whimsically.

"I'd be afraid she'd get hurt," Larre wondered if Gramp knew how he felt

about her. He wondered, as an afterthought, if Gramp knew how Marguery felt about him.

"You'll have a hard time leaving her behind," Gramp replied.

LARRE pressed the flash softly against the lock. He fingered the learned combination. Silently he swung the door open. In the small room he stood quietly, hardly breathing. Gradually he made out the form of the guard where he slept noisily.

Without turning on any light Larre looked down at the sleeping figure. Its breathing became shallower. When he was sure that it would not waken he turned on the light of the pencil lighter, full in the face of the sleeping man.

Gradually Larre's features changed to a likeness of those of the guard on the cot. When he finished he took off his clothes, rolled them into a tight ball, and tossed them under the cot. Next he put on the guard's uniform which he found hanging on the back of a chair. He was ready for what he hoped would be the last dangerous move in this game.

* * *

Larre walked into the office of the Secretary of State Kronholm and instantly knew a moment of terrible indecision. His mind seemed to say that he had gone through this before. Once again he saw the Governor's office. Again the man before him recognized him, —was prepared for him. What was this proficient device of recognition which they possessed?

He knew that he had blundered for a second time. This time he might not be able to save the situation. Instinctively he understood that he must not make the same mistake, he had originally, of leaving the office. He would fight it out here, face to face with the enemy. Here where his antagonist would be with him. He'd try to match the Secretary move for move. If he could stay on his feet maybe he could still come out on top.

Kronholm reached for a buzzer on his desk. Larre reacted instantly. Halfway to its destination, the Secretary's hand stopped. His body stiffened into frozen immobility. His mind struggled with an awful intensity to move the hand forward. Great beads of perspiration formed on his forehead.

Suddenly Larre's intuition clanged an urgent warning. He whirled just in time to see the Secretary's assistant fire. Desperately he spun sideways, attempting to pull himself out of the line of fire. Almost he succeeded. The pellet glanced off the fifth rib, tore through three inches of fatty tissue, and out through the skin of his chest at the base of the breast nipple.

The concussion of the bullet striking his side, knocked him senseless. Even as he plunged into blackness, Larre remembered to retain his hold on the Secretary's motor nerves.

When they lifted Larre from the floor all bodily functions had ceased.

He regained consciousness to find that they had placed him on a table. A man he took to be a doctor bent over him and held a finger to his pulse.

Larre held himself in his suspended animation.

"I'm afraid he's dead," said the doctor. "I'll try adrenalin, but I think we're too late."

Larre was able to dull the terrible pain as the needle plunged into his heart, and he gave no sign of life. The organ absorbed the drug but refused to accept its stimulation.

"It's no use," said the doctor. "He's gone."

"Well, we'll leave him here anyway," said the assistant. "We won't take any chances until you can bring the Secretary out of his catalepsy. Then he can decide what to do."

As soon as they were gone Larre allowed his body to return to normal. It was dangerous to maintain the condition too long.

He knew the door was locked. He probed the walls with his mind and found them charged as he had expected. The windows were barred.

He removed his pencil flash from his pocket and, holding it against the window, flashed it off and on. Repeatedly. He hoped Marguery would spot it.

SOON A mobile blocked out most of the light from the window. A door in the mobile slid back and Marguery stepped into the doorway. She motioned him back. As he stepped aside she turned a small high frequency torch against the bars. They melted like soft candles. Soon there was an opening large enough for Larre to pass through.

Now for the completion of his task. He gathered a blast of energy to send along the tentacle connecting him with the Secretary. One bolt would do the killing.

Suddenly, with nauseating positiveness he saw the fatal weakness in his plan. He couldn't kill in cold blood! Even though he knew he risked Marguery's life as well as his own by hesitating, he was helpless.

His only choice was to try to bring the Secretary to them. If they could capture him, perhaps it would accomplish their purpose just as well.

"Marguery, do you have a gun?"

"Yes, Larre."

"Toss it to me."

While he talked he was busy sending a mental command to the Secretary. *Come!*

He knew this was dangerous, even foolhardy, but he had no choice.

After a five minute wait that seemed to stretch on into a lifetime, the door opened and the Secretary walked into the room. His eyes still fought their stricken battle, but his legs moved woodenly.

Over Kronholm's shoulder a guard fired. Larre returned the shot and for a moment all was still. Then several shots came from the outside corridor, but they were random and found no target.

The Secretary stood on the window sill ready to step into the waiting mobile when it happened. A guard, braver and more rash than the others, sprang into the room, firing, in a suicide attempt to save his employer. Larre caught him in the shoulder with a snap shot that knocked the weapon from his hand. The guard spun once around and slumped down against the wall, leaving a long red smear.

As Larre turned to spring into the waiting vehicle he stopped, awestruck. Like a stiff toy soldier, the Secretary was slowly falling backward. The base of his head was a bloody mass of bone and brain, where the guard's bullet had struck and spread.

A moment later Larre was in the mobile and Marguery was driving at top speed over office buildings, heading for the outskirts.

When they were twenty miles out of the city and no following mobiles materialized, Larre began to breathe easier.

"Where now, Larre?" Margurey asked. "To Gramp's place?"

"Not at all," said Larre, feeling young and carefree again for the first time in a long while. "We're going on our honeymoon."

"I know I should refuse," she smiled, and Larre knew he had won another, happier victory, "because you've probably got me hypnotized into thinking I love you, when I really don't. But—."

She did.

THE END

MINIATURE LIFE-SAVERS

By WILLIAM KARNEY

THE HIGHLY dangerous world of experimental rocketry is no place for an amateur. The design and construction of rockets, jets, helicopters and other types of aircraft of the future would be a very costly project in terms of human lives—if it wasn't for an amatuer contribution—models!

The use of model planes and ships as prototypes in the building of the real ones is no novelty. It's been done for many years. But most of these models have been confined to wind-tunnel tests or settling basin tests. The models are usually carefully constructed with delicate "skin" whose major purpose is to tell the builders about the shape.

But the sandlot boys who fly model airplanes on the end of wires, who build powerful little gasoline and jet motors into them and who make their little planes behave like the real thing, have made a genuine contribution to the advancement of flight and rocketry.

To build full scale rockets and jets and then to test them can be mighty expensive in lives, too expensive in fact. To cut this out, to save daring lives and to make the design of rockets still cheaper, the research labs at Wright Field have a whole department devoted to nothing but the design, construction and flying of every conceivable kind of a model ship, ranging from little biplanes to elaborate jet-engined fighters and rocket-powered cylinders.

Fixed to the end of a long wire, a miniature rocket will tell the engineer through the medium of photography a great deal about how the full-scale job will behave. And he doesn't have to scratch a test pilot either.

There are definite scientific relationships between full size structures and models of those structures, with rigid mathematical connections. From model to mock-up to prototype to finished rocket can almost be predicted on a definite basis. This ingenious technique will be used widely in many other fields as its success becomes known.

Who knows?—maybe one of the foot-long rockets on the testing ground is the model for the coming Lunar job!

★ ★ ★

Martian Meteorologist

By A. T. KEDZIE

NOBODY'S been there. And it looks like it's going to take a little while before anybody makes the trip. But even from our relatively remote position we can tell a lot about the planet Mars—particularly about the weather!

Off-hand if you told anyone you knew a good deal about the weather on an object hundreds of millions of miles away, they'd think you were a little cracked. But the fact of the matter is a lot is known about atmospheric conditions on Mars—through the use of an ingenious technique.

We measure the temperature of a planet with an extremely sensitive thermometer called a radiometer which is really a thermocouple. That sounds like a lot of double talk. It isn't. A thermocouple is simply a pair of wires which happen to generate a small electric current when their twisted-together ends are heated—or when light falls on them—which is the same thing.

By putting one of these delicate thermocouples at the eyepiece of a telescope focused on Mars, and knowing the calibration of the thermocouple, it's easy to tell the temperature of the planet. Furthermore the thermocouple can be made so small that its surface subtends only a small portion of the planet's surface. That means we can study the temperature of sections of the planet, regions as little as two hundred miles in radius or four hundred miles in diameter!

The astronomers have done just that. These temperature measurements coupled with a photographic study of the Martian atmosphere enable them to make what amounts to a meteorological weather map for the planet! Wind currents can be plotted and cyclonic centers located.

In fact such a map looks surprisingly like one of Earth—under similar conditions. The temperatures are a lot more extreme naturally, because of the rarified Martian atmosphere, but the principles are the same. When the fly-boys bounce their first rocket on a Martian plain they're going to have up-to-date data on the weather conditions—that's for sure!

It requires a bit of reflection to appreciate what a magnificent achievement this is; just consider the fact that we can tell a great deal about an alien planet by squatting here in our observatories and extensions of our senses! Is nothing impossible?

★ ★ ★


Eat at
Joe's
Martian Cafe

YOU MIGHT SAY VIRGINIA DARED!

By Dallas Ross



Do you have the kind of name none of your friends can pronounce? Then do what Ginny did: blast off for Mars!



Ginny's job in the Martian hash house had its advantages. There were plenty of characters there so she wouldn't be conspicuous!

THE SENTRY at the gangplank saluted sloppily—spaceman fashion—and said, "Skipper, we got a woman aboard!"

It was only fifteen minutes before blastoff, and I still had my mind on what the governor, the senator, and the glamorous video star had said up there on the platform. This was to be the eighth Mars rocket and they were still giving us big send-offs complete with celebrities, bands, and a mob of newspaper and video men. Of course, the reason for all the glamorizing was to get workers to sign up for a stretch on the new planet. Thus far, no matter what they did in the way of a build-up, the man on the street still wasn't having any—thank you.

I said, vaguely, "What was that?"

"A woman's on board, sir. Came up the gangplank about ten minutes ago with a tray. Said she had some waffles and stuff for the captain."

I scowled at him. "For me?" Waffles are my favorite fruit, but I hadn't ordered any.

"Yes, sir. I think it was a waitress from the airport coffee-shop." He scratched himself reflectively. "Not a bad little trick, skipper. When I consider that it's going to be almost three years..."

I grunted and went on by him into the ship. Some friend had probably placed the order, knowing my weakness, and the girl had probably had trouble finding my quarters.

Jensen, the first officer, pressed sideways against the bulkhead to let me pass in the narrow corridor. I said to him, "Didn't see a waitress in here a few minutes ago, did you, Mr. Jensen?"

"Yes, sir; saw her taking a tray to your cabin. She asked the way."

I scowled again. I didn't have time for this, but, on the other hand, I couldn't have the girl wandering around the ship just before blastoff.

"Look her up, Jensen," I snapped. "Be sure she gets off; we've only got ten minutes to go."

I dropped her from my mind and went on up to the bridge. I was a little anxious about the new booster they were using. Former take-offs for Mars had been made from the space station; starting directly from Earth, it was hoped, would give people more confidence in space travel —make it look more established.

IT WAS about four hours later that I left the bridge in command of the second mate and went down to my quarters with Jensen. As a matter of fact, I had the waffles in mind. They were cold by now, of course, but they were probably my last until we arrived on Mars. I didn't have much faith in the grease cook we had aboard.

I said over my shoulder as we pulled our way along the corridor to my cabin, "You find that girl, Mr. Jensen?"

"No, sir. I searched the ship carefully but she evidently either left by way of the cargo hatch, or got by the gangplank watch when he wasn't looking."

I growled, "That's the trouble with the space service—no discipline. He probably left his post for a few minutes and she got by him then."

My quarters were about the size of a bedroom on a train. Included with the cabin were a tiny bathroom, a folding desk, and an excuse for a closet. It sounds small, but it was tremendous when you consider the value of cargo space in a rocketship.

We entered and I lifted a corner of the napkin spread over the tray. Sure enough, there were half a dozen waffles. There was some coffee, too, but it was cold, of course. Not that it made any difference, there's always plenty of good coffee on a ship, be it an old time windjammer or a rocketship. Coffee's almost as important as fuel.

I took up one of the waffles and tried an experimental bite, handing another to Jensen. It was good. Cold, but you could tell the person who cooked it was an artist. I sighed and wondered why I wasn't ever able to latch onto a ship's cook who could make decent waffles.

Jensen began to say something to the effect that the sentry should have been disciplined for leaving his post, when the closet door swung open and there she was.

I choked on the waffle.

"A woman," Jensen sputtered.

We stared at her a full minute.

Finally I blurted, "Holy jumping *sloors,* Miss! Do you know where you are?"

She gulped, "Yessir."

Now understand, there was nothing sensational about her; you might say she looked like an average waitress—if that means anything. I guess you'd describe her face as *pleasant*; her eyes were a kind of wistful blue, her hair cut short and looking like maybe she didn't have as much time as most women like to spend fixing it up. Just now she reminded you of a little girl who'd been caught doing something she shouldn't. She stood there, wide-eyed, her feet toeing in, nervously twisting the hem of her apron.

I COULD feel the color beginning to creep up from below my collar. I took a deep breath. "Young lady," I began, "...er...what *is* your name?"

"Virginia," she gulped. "Virginia Swabola Cotyowski."

Jensen and I both blinked at that, but I went on. "Miss Coy...Miss Cotow..."

"Just call me Ginny," she said. "Everybody..."

That did it. "Young lady," I roared, "shut up! I was about to ask you what in the world you were doing on this ship."

She stared down at the toe of her shoe.

"Answer the captain," Jensen snapped. He was evidently beginning to realize the possibilities of having one woman and sixty men aboard a congested ship that was to be in space for two hundred and fifty-eight days.

"It...it was all because of Sue, I guess." She twisted at her apron until I expected it to rip.

"Sue who?" I barked.

"Sue who used to work at the coffeeshop with me." She spoke so low that I could hardly make out what she was saying.

I was beginning to get control of myself again. I tried to sound less bullying. "What has this got to do with—"

"She went to Alaska," she explained.

"That's fine," I grated. "But this ship isn't going to Alaska; it's going to Mars."

She swallowed and stared down at her toe again. "Yes, sir. That's even better."

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. Jensen took over.

"Better than what?" he asked her.

"Better than Alaska." She got the rest out all in a rush. "Sue wrote that up in Alaska there were several men for each girl and before she was hardly there a month she got several proposals and she finally married a mine owner and up in Mars there's over a hundred men and no women at all and I thought that would be a good place to go."

She came to the end of that mouthful and gulped. "No competition," she added.

I could feel the color rising up my neck again.

"Young lady," I said with what was meant to be restraint, "under ordinary circumstances, I would sympathize, perhaps, with your efforts at finding a spouse. However, there are sixty men aboard this ship and we are going to be in deep space for over eight months."

I took another deep breath and went on, "If in that time I have the least, the tiniest, the most infinitesimal, bit of trouble because of your presence, I'll have you confined until we reach Mars. This is no cruise ship. I want no shipboard romances; no jealousy among my men due to the fact that you have favored one more than another. Is there any question

about that."

"Yes, sir," she said humbly. "What does infinitesimal mean?"

"Mr. Jensen," I roared, "take this husband hunter out of here and find her a place to sleep. Put her in the second officer's quarters. He can bunk with the third. She'll be able to lock the door there at night." I could feel my voice going up to a roar again. "And what's more, you'd better!"

"Yes, sir," she gulped and started scooting for the door, but I noticed her run her eyes up and down Jensen's neat space uniform calculatingly.

"By the way, Mr. Jensen," I said ominously. "I expect my officers to set an example in this situation. I assume you have no desire to begin this trip as my first officer and end it as a messman?"

He blinked at me. "Captain," he said, "consider me a woman hater." He started for the door after the waitress.

"Er...just a minute," I told her. "Who made those waffles, Miss, er... Miss..."

"Ginny," she said.

"Humph. Well, who made the waffles?"

"I did," she said.

ASIDE from being sore at Virginia Cotyo—er—Cotow—I'd just better call her Ginny—for trying to turn the whole Martian expedition into a matrimonial bureau, I was sorry for her. She didn't know what she was getting into: Mars was a far cry from boasting even the living conditions of Alaska.

There was unbelievable opportunity and plenty of money to be made there, but the trouble was securing labor. The cost of transporting a man to Mars ran into the tens of thousands of dollars; and, to make it worth the investment, the companies had to demand six-year contracts. Six years is no joke; especially with no women, earth liquor selling at five hundred a bottle, one-third gravity, thin air and, on top of it all, the hazards involved in the trip and the possibilities of picking up some unknown Martian disease.

And, at best, she wouldn't be able to get home in less than two years and eight months. It takes only two hundred and fifty-eight days to reach Mars by rocketship, but the catch is that once there you have to wait four hundred and fifty-five days until Mars and Earth are in opposition again so that you can make the return.

Actually, Ginny didn't have too rough a go on the ship. I described my own cabin as about the size of a bedroom on a train. The second officer's quarters was about the size of a roomette. The bunk folded up when not in use and made way for a seat and a tiny table; hardly room to turn around in actually, but still considerably more space than the average crew member was enjoying. There was a tiny mirror and a lavatory; not that it did her much good, water was rationed to the point where there was hardly sufficient to drink. And it was just as well that she hadn't brought along any luggage; there was no room in which to store it.

But her life soon fitted into the ship's routine. I practically went on a waffle diet, with Ginny turning them out as not even mother could.

The galley was so small that when she was in it the ship's cook had to get out. You'd think that would get him in an uproar, but I noticed it didn't. As a matter of fact, nothing that Ginny did made anyone angry. I began to see what it would be like for her on Mars. None of these men were going to see another woman for

at least thirty-two months. Those that were to remain on Mars wouldn't see one for more than six years.

Usually, after breakfast, she'd go to the ship's hospital and sit and talk for awhile with the two crewmen there who had Kingsley-type radiation burns. Sometimes while she talked she'd mend clothes for the crew; sew on buttons, patch shirts. Perhaps men travel in spaceships now but they haven't a machine yet that will patch a hole in a shirt or sew on a button that's ripped off. It's done the same way now as when we rode in covered wagons.

She read a lot, too, like all of us; and, as with the rest, she'd just really got used to the routine of space travel when we arrived.

IF GINNY thought she'd had trouble when we discovered her as a stowaway, it was nothing to the reception she had on Mars. Perhaps you'd think that if they were so short of labor there, she'd be considered better than nothing. After all, Ginny had had a lot of restaurant experience.

But that wasn't it.

As soon as I'd set the ship down and gone through the preliminaries of landing, I took her to the office of the Governor-General of Mars. I'd met him once before; an excitable little duck who had a tendency to dash off in all directions when something out of the way upset his apple-cart. Now, when he saw me enter, he beamed and arose from his chair, a plump hand extended for a shake.

Then he spotted Ginny. His eyes popped and he shook his head until his second chin wobbled—as though she was an apparition and he was trying to clear his head.

She didn't disappear so he stopped shaking and turned his horrified gaze at me. "A woman," he gasped, "You can't do this to me." He plopped back into his chair in dismay.

I scowled at him. "What's the matter with Miss Coty—er—"

"Ginny," Ginny said, looking at the Governor-General in a speculative way. I could see she was sizing him up as husband material.

"I'll admit she was a stowaway," I went on, "but let me tell you, she made herself indispensable on the trip."

The governor waved a chubby hand to quiet me. "That's not it at all..."

I could feel the red starting to steal up from my collar. "Perhaps you think her being here will upset the men. Let me tell you, we found the feminine influence of considerable value on the trip out..."

The Governor-General brushed that aside too. He got to his feet again and began waving his arms. "Can't you see?" he shrilled. *"She's the first woman on Mars!"*

"Stop yelling, man," I roared back at him. "What if she is?"

"What if she is?" The little butterball was almost capering with irritation now. "The companies are spending over ten millions to make Marsha Malloy the first woman to land on Mars. She's due to arrive here the next time earth's in opposition."

"That has-been," Ginny sniffed, barely audibly. She was toeing in again and looking like the wistful little girl she had the first day I found her in my closet. "Besides, I mean, what's all this got to do with me?"

The governor glowered at her. "Miss—er..."

"Ginny," she said.

"...the greatest problem we have on Mars is getting suitable workers —any sort of workers, for that matter—to come here. We offer fantastic pay, free transportation back and forth, insurance, a pension for life, anything. But still they won't come.

They just won't come!" His voice was going high again.

"Don't you see?" he went on, to me as well as to Ginny. "We must get colonists here, families; develop towns with the usual entertainments, theatres, dance halls, and all the rest of it. We must get farmers to grow local crops and bring down the cost of living. We've got to make Mars a desirable place to live."

I TOLD him, "I still don't see what this has got to do with Miss Coty-ow—er—Miss..."

"Ginny," she said.

The governor tried to speak slowly, patiently. "The companies have decided to invest over ten millions in a publicity campaign that should have colonists and workers streaming to Mars by the thousands. Marsha Malloy, the video star, was to come here complete with newsreelmen, publicity experts and the rest of it. She was going to spend the full thirty-two months, then return to earth widely proclaimed as the first woman on Mars.

"She was going to rave about her stay; all-out publicity about the opportunities and the desirability of living on Mars was to sweep the world. Our problems would be solved."

"But why should I spoil it?" Ginny asked. "She can still do it, I mean. Though why you should pick that withered has been—" Ginny sniffed.

The governor glared at her again. "She was the only one who would come. And now, don't you see? She'll be the *second* woman on Mars. Half the publicity value of the stunt will be lost; of what interest are the opinions of the *second* woman on Mars?"

He broke off and stared at her plaintively. "You aren't a video star, are you? Or maybe even a debutante or something?"

Ginny gave him her brightest smile; her quarter tip one, she calls it. "No, a waitress."

"A waitress!"

I came to her rescue. "Miss—er—Ginny's a confounded good waitress, and, besides, she makes the best waffles..."

The governor sat down once again and closed his eyes painfully. "An off-the-arm expert, a hash slinger. The first woman on Mars." He put his head into his hands and sobbed, "She makes good waffles, he says."

Suddenly, I had an inspiration. "Listen," I told them, "Marsha Malloy can still be the first woman on Mars."

They stared at me as though I'd burnt out a tube.

"She isn't due to arrive until next opposition," I said. "That's two years, eight months from now and it's when my own ship is due to blast off for its return. I'll take Ginny back to Earth with me and we'll swear everyone to secrecy and keep mum about her ever having been here; she was a stowaway, so there isn't any record of her passage. Marsha Malloy's publicity will go through as per schedule."

Hope returned to the governor's eyes. He looked at Ginny. "Is that satisfactory to you Miss—er..."

"Ginny," she said, blinking her eyes wistfully. "Sure, it's all right with me, if you don't want me to be the first woman on Mars. I don't want to ruin your plans. And I'll go back if you don't want me here; the only reason I came—"

I interrupted her. "Uh, just one other thing, Governor," I said. "When Ginny appeared on the ship, a stowaway, I found only one solution to the problem."

He looked puzzled. "What problem was that, Captain?"

I snorted in irritation. "The

problem of having one woman and sixty men in close proximity."

He rubbed his plump hand over his mouth thoughtfully and looked at the ceiling. "Hmmmm, I see what you mean. What was your solution, captain?"

"I forbade her, under threat of confinement, to carry on a romance with any member of the crew. It was quite successful, we had no trouble with Miss—er—Ginny, on the whole trip."

"Hmmmm. Quite sensible. Miss—er..."

"Ginny," Ginny said, "But, oh *no*, you can't do this to me. I came all the way..."

"...I hereby warn you that as a measure of Martian security I forbid you to have any romantic dealings with any colonist of Mars, on pain of imprisonment, until the time you are due to blast off."

GINNY went back to work at her old profession in the only coffeeshop on Mars.

There were only ten stools in the place and during the hours she was on the job, the men stood outside in long lines waiting to be served. The owner of the coffeeshop raised the price of coffee from one dollar to five dollars per cup.

Virginia Swabola Cotyowski was a monopoly.

In two months she quit her job and built her own restaurant with the tips she'd made. In short order she'd made enough to retire, if that's what she'd wanted. You see, there were over a hundred and fifty men on Mars and each of them making more money than a banker and with nothing to spend it on. Nothing.

Well, time passed, and Marsha Malloy arrived on schedule and my ship blasted for Earth the same day.

Only Ginny wasn't on it as we had first planned. And neither was little Virginia Dare Smith. And neither was I for that matter. Jensen was in command.

You see, I'd finally become so irritated by that last name of Ginny's that I'd changed it to Smith. That's mine.

Oh, I sound like a heel, eh? Making arrangements so that neither the crew of my ship nor the colonists of Mars could make a play for her, and leaving myself with a clear field.

Well, I can be broken down. Let me tell you, all's fair in love and war, especially *love* when you've finally found the girl who can make waffles *exactly* the way you want them and when she has over a hundred and fifty other men just mad about her. Under those circumstances, brother, you use strategy.

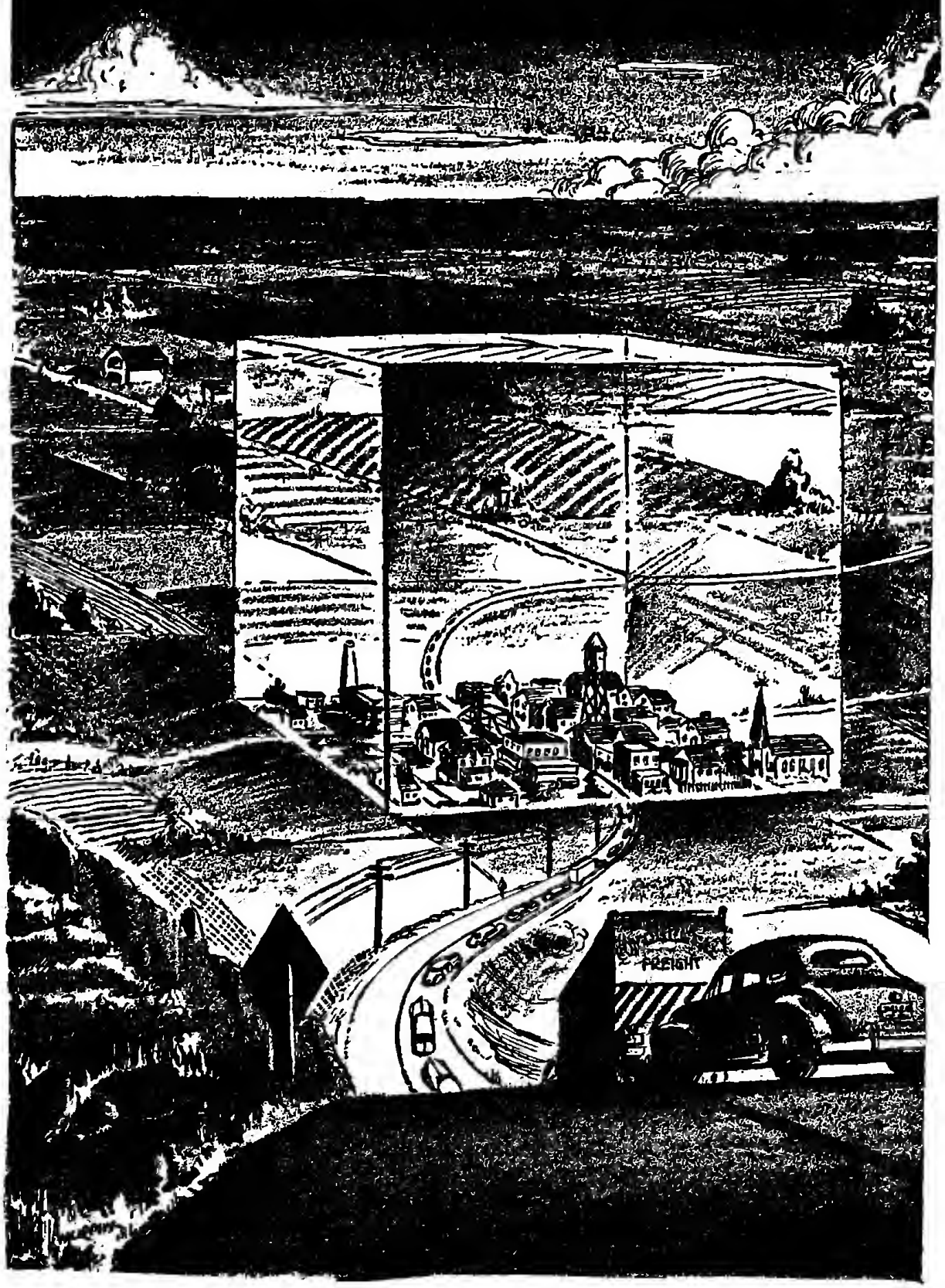
Anyway, to get back to the story, Mars is doing fine now. When the publicity men went to work on the fact that an everyday American family, the husband a mechanic, the wife a waitress, and the baby a perfectly normal little girl born right on Mars, lived on the new planet, it made all the difference in the world.

Colonists and workers began to arrive with every spaceship that landed. Especially when it was found that the husband—that's me—made a thousand a week as a mechanic and that the wife, before quitting her waitress job, had been taking in several hundred a night in tips.

What happened to Marsha Malloy? She's making personal appearances now in Joe's Martian Coffeeshop as a waitress. She took over the job which Ginny had left. Marsha says there's more money in it than being a video star on earth.

THE END

The SQUARES FROM



SPACE

By P. F. Costello

Earth's only hope of defeating these monsters from space hinged on the courage of a newspaper man and the girl he loved

THEY CAME from above. Shimmering, silvered, opalescent squares of light that descended swiftly, silently onto the broad planes of Earth. They were gleaming, terrifyingly immense shapes that had appeared without warning in the clear sky of a July morning.

They were four in number. They struck various sections of the northern hemisphere and rested in ghastly shining silence.

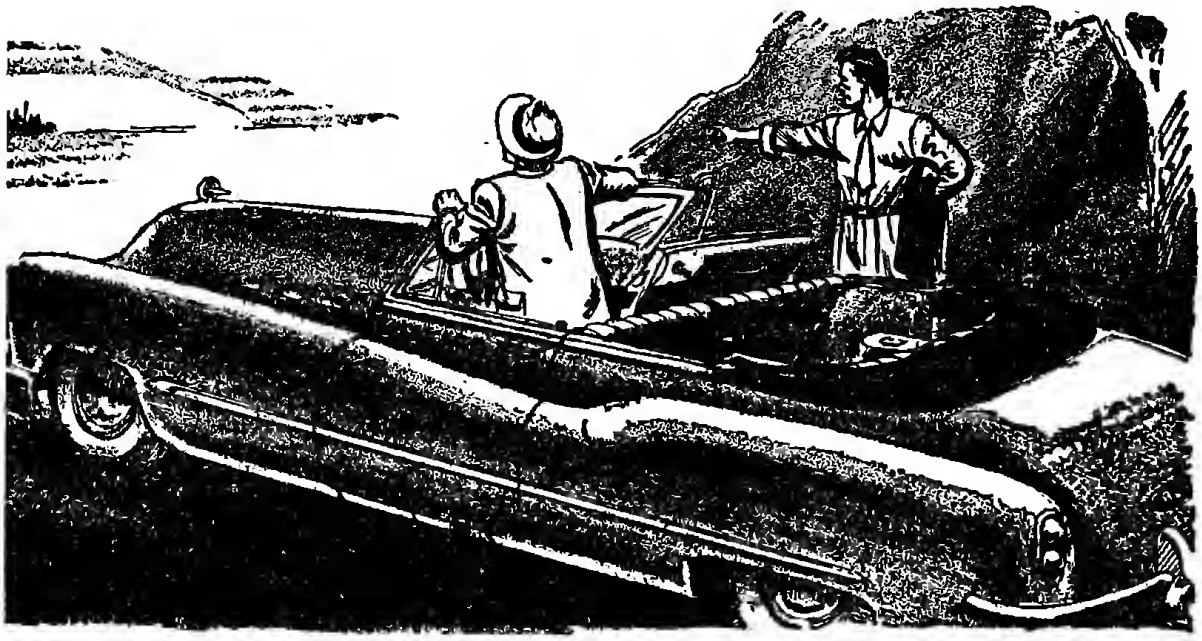
Within their high walls were trapped whole villages with all the inhabitants.

They rested...

Persons who saw the vast squares were blinded by the shimmering brilliance of their walls.

Someone got to a phone. The alarm spread. Within minutes the first incredible rumors were circulating. From an army camp sixty-four miles from one of the squares, an armored division was dispatched to investigate the phenomenon.

It was a weird sight they gazed upon in that moment. The whole town seemed to be enclosed in a glass cube



Newspaper offices began to hum with the impact of the fantastic story.

Then the squares moved upward again, travelling with blinding, dizzying speed. They vanished from the atmosphere of Earth within forty-five minutes of the instant they had first been sighted.

And with them disappeared every human being who had been trapped within their gleaming silver walls....

"VANISHED? Disappeared? What kinda gag you trying to hand me?" Leslie Trent said to his managing editor. He had to raise his voice to be heard over the confusion of the city room. When he'd left for lunch an hour ago the hottest story in the making was an expected announcement by a politician regarding the city's budget. Now, crowded about the teletypes that poured wire copy into the paper, were the publishers, the city editors, two or three re-write men, and a cluster of picture-desk personnel and copy boys.

Osterphillips, the *Blade's* managing editor, held Leslie's arm tightly. They were standing at the rear of the frenzied group who surged around the teletypes, jerking out the copy as fast as it came in.

Leslie still wore a hat and coat and there was a pipe stuck negligently in his mouth. He was a sparely built young man, with sandy hair and his normal expression of cynical good humor.

"I'll give it to you once more," Osterphillips said, in a somewhat ragged voice. "Everything we've got so far is coming from an AP correspondent in Broadville, Indiana."

"Does he drink?" Leslie inquired.

"His story is the first confirmation we've had on reports from four separate areas. This is no gag, Les." Osterphillips ran a hand distractedly through his thinning hair. "Broadville, Indiana, is gone, vanished. The people, anyway. Eyewitnesses swear that a huge silver square settled over the town, walling it in. When it lifted every single person in the city had disappeared. I want you to hop down there as fast as you can."

"Okay, but I still think this has the odor of the phony about it. What about the other places that are supposed to have been attacked by this opium eater's Pied Piper? Any dope on them yet?"

"Just rumors, so far. According to them, one of these things landed in Kansas, another in Pennsylvania, and the last somewhere in Alabama."

"Not to forget little old Broadville," Leslie said. "Okay, I'll get going."

"Send in lots of color and interviews and get pictures of the people of the town, as many as you can. I've already got a story working on the history of the place, its prominent families, and so forth. Hell, you know your job. But make it fast."

LESLIE caught a plane from Chicago that got him to Broadville in an hour. He took a cab with several other newsmen into the city.

It was a ghost town.

Leslie prowled its deserted streets, peered into its empty homes and silent schools, and the shock he had felt at first sight of the empty village deepened with every new evidence of the ghastly fate that had singled out Broadville for complete catastrophe.

He had thought the news was some sort of gag at first. Now he knew better. He had seen half-eaten meals on tables, showers still running, gas flames burning in ovens. There were cakes baked to brick-hardness in some kitchens, and coffee pots melting on stoves in other homes. Car engines had been left running all over the

city, and the traffic lights were still blinking red and green with mindless regularity.

Everywhere the picture was the same. A thriving bustling community had been halted in its routine of living with calamitous abruptness. But how? And by what?

Leslie came out of an empty house and stood in the mid-afternoon sunlight scratching his chin. A maintenance man from the gas company of a nearby town hurried past, intent on his job of cutting the gas mains before there were any explosions.

Leslie walked along the main street, watching the workers from the water and utilities companies doing their jobs, and automatically, almost instinctively, he began to put together the story he would phone to his paper. He joined a group of newspapermen who were listening to an old man—a graying, bent figure, whose rheumy eyes were glazed with shock.

"I saw it, I tell you, and I got down on my knees right there in the field and started to pray," he said in a quivering, age-cracked voice. "It was bigger than anything I ever seen in my life and it came down from the heavens like a sign from Almighty God. It was shining and silvery and it closed in the town with its big high sides. When it went away I come running into the town looking for my little grandson and my family. But they was gone. All gone, I tell you."

He looked beseechingly at the reporters, studying each face with desperate hope. "What was it?" he asked.

The men could only shake their heads slowly. Their normal brashness was dampened by the old man's terror—and the immensity of what he had described.

Leslie left Broadville that night about eight o'clock, after having filed thousands of words, with Western Union, to his paper. Looking down at Broadville from the window of his plane he shuddered slightly. He wondered if that fate could happen to all of Earth. If some all-powerful agency could strip his world of its people, leaving it silent, ghost-like, barren.

WHEN HE landed in Chicago he called Marcia Frazer, a graduate student at the University. She answered the phone herself, and Leslie felt some of the bleak coldness leave him at the sound of her clear fresh voice.

"It's Leslie," he said. "May I come over?"

"I was hoping you'd call. I tried to get you at the paper earlier. They told me you'd flown down there. What in the name of God has happened?"

"God is undoubtedly the only source who might tell us," he said drily. "I'm not a fount of information, if that's what you're looking for."

"Come over anyway. It'll do me good to talk to you."

He took a cab to her one-and-a-half room apartment and Marcia met him at the door. She was a tall, auburn-haired girl with fine square shoulders and warm honest features.

She made two drinks and sat beside him on the sofa. She curled her slim legs beneath her and regarded him gravely.

"Well?" she said.

He shrugged. "The people of Broadville are gone, unquote," he said. "You can read that in my story tomorrow. But not much else." He shook his head. "I'm scared, Marcy. I saw a lot during the war that I never imagined I'd see topped for sheer horror. But, somehow, this damn thing is worse."

"I've had the radio on all day," Marcia said. "No one knows anything, apparently. The President spoke at three and told everyone to keep calm, continue with his work, and so

forth. That didn't help much."

"I don't think we have to be afraid of ourselves," Leslie said. "Those squares weren't from Earth."

Marcia stared at him wordlessly. Then she said: "But, why, Leslie?"

He shrugged helplessly. "I'm no answer man, I told you."

"I want to show you something," she said. "Maybe I'm being foolish but I didn't have anything to do all day, so I tried to use my head." She crossed to a small desk and returned with a piece of paper on which she'd drawn criss-crossing lines.

Leslie glanced at it, frowning. "Explanation, please," he said.

"Okay, but don't laugh."

She sat on the arm of his chair and put her finger on an X that was drawn on the paper. "That represents Broadville, Indiana. The other X's indicate where the three other squares struck Earth. You can see that these four spots are equi-distant from one another, and that they form a diamond. I looked up the places on a map and they are almost exactly one thousand miles apart. It's just as if someone marked this area off with a compass and a ruler, then hit each corner of the square with one of these silver contraptions."

LESLIE studied the chart for a moment or so, then glanced at her. "Well, what else?" he said.

"It might not mean anything at all, of course," she said. "But doesn't it seem logical to infer from this that these silver squares came here in an orderly fashion? It obviously wasn't a hit-or-miss proposition. Further, if it *was* planned that these squares should capture human beings from equi-distant areas, then it might be that the attack was in the nature of a sampling process."

"Slow down a bit," Leslie said. "You're doing fine. But you're getting ahead of me."

"Well, I'm merely suggesting that someone or something is interested in the people of Earth, and wants to know more about them. And so, quite logically—he or it—picks up some human beings from various equi-distant areas to give him—or it—a cross-section of the people."

"Damn it, it seems too pat," Leslie said. "But you could be so right."

"Okay, supposing these attacks were a planned sampling of Earth's population," Marcia said. "Then it's logical to assume that the process isn't complete."

"Why?"

"Assuming that someone—let's say Planet X—is out to pick off a cross-section of the people of Earth, and assuming further that Planet X has space machines of some kind and an orderly approach to the job, then it's logical to assume such a methodical operation would not hinge on one test, or one sample. Planet X is obviously intelligent enough to realize that they don't have a typical sampling of our people as yet. And that would indicate that there will be more visits from the silver squares."

"That's just dandy," Leslie said with bitter humor. He lit his pipe and puffed on it for several moments in silence. "Marcy, I have the horrible feeling that you've hit on something."

"Now listen again," Marcia said excitedly. "From the center of the square that is formed by the four points of contact, I drew out thousand-mile lines on the northeast, southwest, northwest, southeast axis. It's possible, isn't it, that Planet X will maintain the thousand-mile distance between the silver squares, but criss-cross the present area on the next sampling? That would give them eight samples of a thousand squares miles of the northern hemisphere, which might be enough to complete the job."

"If you're right, who gets it next?" Jim asked.

"A little town called Bingham, in Colorado. Two of the spots are wasteland, the third is in the Gulf of Mexico. But Bingham is right at the termination of the thousand-mile southwest line."

Leslie stood and paced the floor. "It's fantastic," he muttered. "But the whole world looks fantastic to me right now." He suddenly caught her by the shoulders. "I'm going to buy your guess-work. I'll ask the boss to let me fly out to Bingham tonight."

"Les, take me with you?" Marcia cried.

"Huh? Not a chance. You've got your studies." He gestured vaguely. "You can't go running off like that."

"Oh, to hell with the studies," Marcia said. "The world is turning upside down and you expect me to stay here conjugating early English verbs and getting giddy over the fact that Swift changed his metaphor in A Tale Of The Tub. I tell you—"

He grinned at her outburst. "Baby, it's not going to be easy, you know."

"Please take me along, Les. It was my idea, you've got to admit. Let me in on the fun, please!"

"Fun? It might not be fun."

"You know what I mean. Please, Les." She hugged him suddenly, fiercely. "I won't let you go unless you promise."

He looked at her in some confusion. He felt the full sweet lines of her body and the softness of her hair against his cheek. Their relationship had been casual and pleasant for several years. They liked the same things, had fun together, but Les had thought of her as a schoolgirl, as a youngster who wasn't quite ready for life. Now he knew better.

"Okay," he said, grinning down at her. "I'd take you anywhere."

"I won't settle for anyplace but Bingham, Colorado," she said.

ANOTHER impatient edict from my Leader," Les said, sliding into the restaurant booth beside Marcia. "He wants to know why, in a week's time, I haven't put Bingham on the map."

"Maybe we *are* wasting time," Marcia said.

Les patted her hand comfortingly. "Editors feel you're wasting time and money no matter what you're doing," he said. "We'll stick it out a few more days."

They had been in Bingham nine days now and so far there hadn't been the slightest indication that Marcia's hunch was correct.

Bingham was a village of about three thousand people. The main street was typical of small towns throughout the country. There was a general store displaying everything from feed sacks to corsets in its windows, a shoe shop, a photographer, a movie house and two restaurants—all negative in appeal. The main street ran into a grassy square ornamented by the statue of a horse and rider, who had figured somehow in Colorado's history, and beyond the square was the two-story, red-brick court house.

"Let's take a walk," Les suggested, with a distasteful glance at the cupful of what the restaurant solemnly asserted to be coffee, but which he privately felt was a concoction of roots, mud and old Brillo pads.

It was evening, and a cool breeze was blowing. The day had been hot and sultry and the change was a pleasant relief. Les and Marcia walked to the square, then returned to the hotel.

"I'll buy a beer," Les suggested.

"Sounds fine."

They went into the small lounge, took seats at the bar and ordered

bottles of beer. Seated in a booth in the rear of the lounge, Les noticed, was a man he had seen about the town for the past week—a tall, dark-haired man of perhaps forty, with bushy eyebrows and a wide thin mouth.

"Our friend is cutting-up too," he said to Marcia.

"Who is he, do you suppose?" Marcia said.

"Well, he's obviously not a local inhabitant."

The man suddenly stood and walked toward them, a thin smile on his face. He nodded to Les and bowed slightly to Marcia.

"Forgive me for intruding," he said in a soft, slightly foreign voice. "But it seems that we are all hapless victims of this town's dullness. Perhaps we could have a drink together and talk a while." He said this tentatively, while smiling at Marcia.

"Sit down," Les said. He nodded to the bartender. "Another beer, please."

"My name is Strauss, Joseph Strauss," the man said, climbing onto a bar stool.

Les introduced himself and Marcia.

Strauss said casually, "You are a newspaperman, no?"

Les glanced at him. "How did you know that?"

"It is hardly a mystery," Strauss said, shrugging. "You have filed stories to a Chicago paper from the local Western Union office. The clerk there has talked about it. And so—" He spread thin hands deprecatingly.

"What line are you in?" Les asked bluntly.

"I am an observer," Strauss said, chuckling slightly.

"What are you observing in Bingham?"

"I don't know—yet," Strauss said. "However, I feel that something very well worth observing may occur here quite soon."

LES FELT vaguely uneasy with the man. There was something insinuating and sly about him that he didn't quite like. He nudged Marcia's knee discreetly with his own, and then finished his beer. "We were just getting ready to leave," he said.

Marcia stood up, murmured, "It was nice to meet you," and strolled to the door.

"A pity," Strauss murmured.

"We'll see you again," Les said, and went out with Marcia.

In the street, they glanced at each other. "Queer one," Les said.

"I wonder what he's waiting for?" Marcia said, frowning.

"The same thing we are," Les said. "I'd bet on that."

They walked along in silence for a few moments and then, as they passed the movie house, Les suddenly grabbed Marcia's arm. Above them had appeared a weird luminous glow.

"What is it?" Marcia said tensely.

"Wait!" Les said.

They stared upward. Directly above them the sky had changed color. Its soft evening blue was charged with a blazing radiance. The flashing tints of silver spread across the sky, from horizon to horizon, until the entire bowl of the heavens was raging with white fire.

Everyone in the streets stared fearfully upward, and then a woman's scream split the charged air as a mighty square of silver broke through the clouds and settled with blinding speed about the town of Bingham.

Les tightened his grip about Marcia's shoulder as the vast square closed about them, walling them off from the rest of Earth, blinding them with the glare of its solid, gleaming walls.

There was a second of stunned, desperate silence. Then a child, catch-

ing the taste of fear from the adults, began to cry piteously.

"Hold me close, Les," Marcia cried.

He started to answer; but the breath was suddenly crushed from his lungs. He felt a blinding pain and knew he was falling. His arm was still about Marcia's shoulders, and she had fallen too. The concrete of the street was against his cheek, and its rough cold texture was the last thing he felt.

"YOU ARE of the last. Tell me of yourself!"

The words were forced into Leslie's mind. His eyes opened. He lay on his back staring upward at a gleaming silver ceiling. His thoughts were splintered, confused. Where was he? How had he come here?

"Typical reflex! Is there no originality in the people of Earth?"

Leslie heard no sound, but the words were somehow insistently forced into his mind. Their import was as clear as if they had been shouted into his ear.

He struggled to a sitting position, as memories came to him. There was the Sunday-stillness of the little town of Bingham. And then the vivid brightness that preceded the appearance of the mighty silver square. Marcia had been with him, his arm had been around her as they fell...

Staring about him in frantic confusion he saw that he was on a small dais in the middle of an enormous chamber. The walls of sheer shining metal seemed to rise endlessly to meet the vast domed ceiling.

Before him on a larger dais about fifty feet away squatted a huge *thing!* The folds of flesh-like substance that trembled and undulated there was a leprous gray in color, and from it emerged something that resembled a human form, but with a head magnified and distorted into nightmarish proportions.

The distance from the thing's pointed chin to its flat skull was more than six feet; and the width of the mammoth skull was even greater. Half-way between the chin and skull-top there was a hole about six inches in diameter. That aperture was the only break in the soft, trembling, gray surface of the head.

Leslie stared in silent horror at this obscenity.

"Another typical reaction. Why do you of Earth assume that creatures of another planet would resemble your own shape? Are none possessed of rudimentary intelligence?"

"What are you? What do you want of me?" Leslie cried, springing to his feet.

"Better. Direct questions indicate a glimmering of mentality."

There was no sound in the shining vaulted chamber, but Leslie knew, in some way he *knew,* that the words were emanating from within the depths of the huge leprous head.

Leslie saw then that the head rested in loose folds of flesh-like material that spread over the surface of the dais like a dirty rumpled rug. Protruding from these folds were two tiny flippers, that looked as if they might be atrophied arms.

"Tell me of yourself!"

"Where are the other people from Earth?" Leslie said. He felt now as if he were living through a rather long nightmare; but he knew it would be futile to attempt to analyze the situation. He had to accept it at its face merit, and proceed from that point onward. "You'll get no information from me until you tell me what you've done with the other people from Earth."

"Some of you are no more. Others still live. It is not important. But I must learn of Earth. I will not bring more of you here until I know more about you. Perhaps you will not be

usable in any case."

LESLIE FELT that he was hanging to his sanity by a thin thread. This monstrous head was alive, intelligent, and needed information about Earth. He could accept those facts in cold reason. But their implications were enough to make perspiration break out on his forehead.

"You are frightened."

The words beat into his mind.

"That is the reaction that is most typical of your class. That is why I weary of you so quickly, and despair of shaping you to my needs. Fear is a necessary reaction, of course, but it must not be distorted with emotional overtones. Things fear, as they hunger and thirst, but they must do it passively, instinctively, and not give way to emotional feelings of retaliation. You of Earth have not learned that. Your fear creates unpredictable reactions. Some of you become more pliable, but others become intractable. Likewise, you have concepts that you designate as love, and loyalty, and honor, and so forth. These, too, are merely words that describe varying reactions in the specific individual. Honor and love and loyalty mean one thing to you, and another thing entirely to another person. On the whole you are a most unstable and unsatisfactory group."

"What do you want of us?" Leslie said.

"We need the movers of Earth to replenish the movers of Mercury. Many ages past, the masters of Mercury began a systematic breeding process, the end of which was the development of types like myself—beings possessing intelligence of almost infinite power. Meanwhile our movers retrogressed in the opposite direction. You have no concept for mover. Your word slave has an implication of involuntary acts that would not fit our term. Our movers are creatures without will or volition, whose only purpose is to serve the masters. However, the movers became more and more functional. The ultimate was achieved when we were able to use them for inanimate functions. We transformed them into dwellings, into tools, scientific apparatus, and even into instruments of pleasure. This had the unlooked-for effect of draining off our supply of movers, particularly since the masters' idea of pleasure was frequently destructive. The rulers became lazy and voluptuous over the years, and thoughtlessly exhausted the movers in sadistic rites until they ceased reproducing themselves. Now we must find a substitute for our movers. We have become immobile physically, as you may see. Therefore we have been sampling the movers of Earth, and so far the results are unsatisfactory. Your inconsistent concepts are an impediment in our work. We have asked your help. Some of you refuse. Others are eager to cooperate. This whimsical reaction can lead only to confusion. Perhaps you too will prove unsatisfactory."

"I am not eager to cooperate with you, if that's part of your definition of unsatisfactory," Leslie said. "What right have you to steal people from their native planet and bring them here to use as slaves?"

"Right? There is no right except our need. You seem to be intelligent. Perhaps it would be worth while talking to you again..."

When that thought faded out, Leslie felt a sudden excruciating pain at the base of his skull. His mind was dazed. He fought helplessly to remain conscious. He had a last image of the head—huge, gross, unmoving—and then he went out....

HE OPENED his eyes to a semi-darkness. He was lying on a smooth surface. He lay still for a moment, trying to recall everything that had happened. Finally he got slowly to his feet. He felt his face and found a thick beard growing there. But he wasn't weak or hungry.

From the faint light emanating from the smooth walls he saw that he was in a cell about six feet square. There was a door with a mesh screen covering its upper half, but no other aperture.

He paced the floor, desperately trying to remain calm. He had no way of guessing what had happened to Marcia, but the horrible words of the head were ringing in his mind:

"Some of you are no more. Others still live."

He hadn't the vaguest idea how much time had passed since he'd been snatched from Earth. The three-inch beard on his face was only a slight help. His beard grew slowly, he knew from days in the South Pacific during the war. Weeks might have passed; or months.

Finally he tired of walking and sat down on the smooth floor. Then, so faintly as to make him mistrust his ears, he heard a gentle tapping noise on the opposite side of the wall against which he was leaning. Leslie turned, his heart pounding, and put his ear to the wall. The sound came again. Three measured taps, this time. He fumbled through his pockets with frantic haste and found a coin, a half-dollar. Praying that it would be heavy enough, he rapped it three times against the smooth surface.

He waited a moment, and in the coiling silence he could hear the sound of his heart and his controlled breathing. Then his signal was returned. Three short taps, and then two, with a longer interval between them. Leslie tapped out an identical signal and waited again. When the tapping resumed he realized with a sudden surge of hope that the sender was using Morse code.

The first word that he painstakingly made out was Patience. The second was Standby.

Patience! Standby!

There was no other sound from the wall.

Leslie sat back on his heels, a faint smile on his face. Someone from Earth was in the adjoining cell, and obviously had some means of beating this trap. That would be a distinct and unpleasant surprise for the head!

And with that thought came a sudden pain at the base of his skull. He cried out! His thoughts faded, his mind went blank....

LESLIE opened his eyes in the great silvered chamber. The head, obscene and omniscient, faced him from its dais. There were two creatures at Leslie's side, robots of some sort, bullet-shaped, with thin powerful legs, and coiling whip-like arms. They stood about six feet tall and reflected the light as if made of metal.

"Les!"

He turned his head at the cry. Marcia was at the opposite side of the chamber, in the grip of two more of the strange robots. He lunged toward her, but the creatures at his side moved faster, and their steel-hard flexible arms whipped about him, pinioning him helplessly. He struggled wildly but ineffectually against the tremendous strength of the metal arms.

"This is useless, of course."

Leslie thought at first that the head had forced the idea into his mind. But then he realized that the words had actually been spoken, and their echoes were ringing in the vast vaulted chamber. He turned dazedly to the sound, and saw a thin dark-haired

man regarding him with an ironic smile. The man stood at the base of the head's dais, his hands thrust negligently into the pockets of his coat. Leslie recognized him with a start. He was Joseph Strauss, the man who'd spoken to them in the little bar at Bingham. The man who'd called himself an observer.

"Those creatures are infinitely stronger than you are," Joseph Strauss said. "I assisted in their design, so I am something of an authority on their performance," he added sardonically.

Leslie glanced at the head's vast leprous surface, then turned to Marcia. "Are you all right?" he said.

"Yes, I'm all right, Les." She moved involuntarily toward him, but the creatures at her side tightened their grip, and she stopped short, wincing with pain.

"You will learn eventually," Joseph Strauss said, smiling without humor. "Now let us talk a moment. I bear you no ill-will, of course. Instead I wish to help you. We are in the presence of pure intelligence, and it understands everything we are saying, and every nuance in our intonation. It needs knowledge of Earth, and I am helping supply that knowledge. You too can be useful if you will forget your futile and emotional affection toward Earth."

"That was easy for you to do, obviously," Leslie said.

"I am not seriously affected by your sarcasm," Joseph Strauss murmured. "However, you are correct. I planned to come here, as you did. I guessed, as I presume you did, where the next silver square might strike. But my motives were different. You wanted what? A news story, perhaps. I wanted to avenge myself on Earth, and its systems of pious hypocrisy that masquerade as religion and government."

"Desist!"

THE SINGLE word struck Leslie's mind with sledge-hammer impact. Glancing at Joseph Strauss, he deduced that he had received the same silent command. Strauss was erect now, face impassive, staring at the head with mesmeric concentration.

"I am weary of your argument. I will tell you why I have brought you to my presence." Leslie knew that was meant for him. "This other creature—the female—has refused to be pliable. She holds a concept of you that is difficult for me to understand. The name you give it is love. She considers you in a manner that is sweet and tender and absurdly flattering. I do not see the attributes in you that cause this adoring reaction on her part. However, that is one of the things I need to know."

Leslie turned to Marcia. She met his gaze, her chin held high. "I've told nothing, Les. I don't care if I die. This thing is obscene and evil."

"How pointless. What is gained by dying?"

Leslie turned from Marcia as the head's thought came alive in his mind.

"I wonder that you are not reasonable, which is a way of saying, fatalistic. You gain nothing by refusing my demands. I can unveil your thoughts at any instant I wish, and study the materials of your mind at my leisure. However, that will not give me the clue to these curious inconsistencies of yours. Until I understand them I must be cautious in expanding my ideas about your planet. Look at it in this manner: the female will not tell me of Earth, although her defiance serves no good end. Further, I may destroy her for refusing to cooperate with me. Still she is adamant. This whimsical imbalance is beyond my immediate un-

derstanding."

The head was silent a moment, its vast gray surface unmoving. Then the thoughts came again.

"You—the male—are involved with the female in this extremely involved thing you term love. Now you must tell her to speak to me of her life on Earth. When she complies with your command, one inconsistency will have been resolved. I will know that your positions are not inflexible, but are subject to pressure. Then I will merely have to find the right pressures to make all of you conform."

"She has her own decision to make," Leslie said.

Marcia struggled furiously within the embrace of the robot's whip-like arms, "I don't care what he tells me," she said hotly, facing the grotesque head. "I'll tell you nothing."

There was silence in the vast chamber. Then came the head's thought:

"You are unworkable until I find the lever that will bend you easily and inevitably to my design. I will have to apply various pressures in a process of elimination until I find the one which breaks your stubborn resistance."

Joseph Strauss smiled at Marcia. "Pain is the lowest common denominator of the emotions," he said.

The head's thought came: "Very well. I will determine whether or not her prejudices will melt in the crucible of pain. If not I will have to experiment with more refined pressures."

"You can't do that to her!" Leslie cried furiously.

He lunged desperately toward Marcia, but his movement was halted by a sledge-hammer blow of pain at the base of his skull. He collapsed with a moan and his last sight was of Marcia, white-faced and terrified, being jerked roughly away by the robot guards....

WHEN HIS consciousness returned that scene was foremost in his mind. He was lying in his cell. He got to his feet and paced the floor frantically. He had no way of knowing how much time had passed. Marcia might have been undergoing torture for weeks. She might be dead. He slammed a fist into the palm of his hand and cursed impotently.

Then, as if in answer to his needs, there came a faint tapping on the wall. Leslie dropped quickly to the floor and answered the signal. Then he pressed his ear to the wall and listened tensely.

The message came firmly, in one word.

"*Now*!"

There was nothing else. Leslie stood and faced the door. He waited for several moments and then his muscles tightened as he heard a sound beyond the door. The door swung inward and Leslie was staring at one of the bullet-shaped robots he had seen in the great chamber where the head rested. The creature returned his gaze with a blank metallic stare, and then stepped aside; and Leslie's jaw dropped as a small gray-haired man hurried into his cell, hand outstretched, a slight smile twisting his lips.

"Eaton's the name," he said. "Professor Eaton," he added, wringing Leslie's hand. "There's not much time for talk, so I'll give it to you fast. I've worked on this ever since we were jerked up here. Hypnotism, you know. That's the way he operates. I can handle two or three of these creatures of his now. Maybe more. The first year I got one of them to drop a food capsule, then a weapon. Next year I was able to move them around a bit. But I waited—"

"Good God, how long have we been here?" Leslie said.

"Hard to tell, exactly." Professor Eaton said. "In the neighborhood of three years, at least. We've been under mental anesthetics between interviews. There aren't many left, of course. He kept me alive because he enjoyed talking with me. You too, I suppose."

Leslie caught the professor's arm. "How can I get to the head's chamber?"

"Impossible. We've got a chance to get away, if we work fast. We can get to one of the silver squares; they're space ships, of course."

"I've got to get to the chamber," Leslie said. "There's a girl there I—"

"You won't make it, of course," the professor said. He thought a moment, then shrugged. "A man should have the privilege of choosing his death. I can tell you how to get there, give you a weapon, but it won't work, you know." He took a tube from his pocket. "This is effective against the robots. I collected it from one of them I was able to control."

"And the chamber?"

"Very well. The years here have made me a fatalist, I believe. Go your way. I'll collect the few remaining humans and try to make the space ship. Should you, by some miracle, succeed, I'll tell you how to find us. Now take the first turn right off this corridor..."

Leslie raced along the last of the labyrinthine passages leading to the great chamber which was the nerve point of the rulers of Mercury. He made a dozen twisting turns as he followed the high gleaming corridors. He passed dozens of the bullet-shaped robots standing motionless at regular intervals along the passages.

Ahead of him loomed a vast arch, its apex disappearing in a blinding maze of refracting light. Below it were great doors of shining metal. He ran forward, his breath coming raggedly. He put his shoulder against the door and exerted pressure. The door began to open, swinging inward slowly.

The widening aperture gave him a view of the vast chamber. His breath caught harshly at the scene that met his eyes.

DIRECTLY before the dais the body of Marcia was suspended on a metal scaffold, and from above a blue light played over her palely glowing skin. She was spread-eagled helplessly, her wrists and ankles secured with gleaming wire.

The leprous surface of the head was twitching and undulating as Marcia's slender body strained against its bonds. Leslie could almost feel the secretions of evil malignancy emanating from the head.

The man called Joseph Strauss was at the foot of the dais, and two bullet-shaped robots were beside the scaffolding. As Leslie watched, he saw Marcia twist in agony, and her head moved helplessly back and forth as tremors shook her glowing body.

He shoved open the door and crashed into the vast chamber. He pressed the catch on the metal tube in his hand and pointed its end at one robot, then at the other. He did this as he raced toward the scaffolding, with no thought or hope in his mind of distracting the head from its ghastly purpose.

The robots staggered and then, incredibly, melted away before his eyes. Leslie flashed the tube upward, seeking the source of the light playing on Marcia's body. He saw a great blue disc near the domed ceiling, and pressed the catch on the tube. The light winked out; and Marcia's body slumped, unconscious, against its bonds.

Leslie wheeled toward the head. As he did so, a tremendous pressure grew

in his skull. His brain felt as if it were being squeezed in a powerful vise. He shook his head like a groggy fighter. Splintered fragments of thoughts and commands rocked his consciousness.

But they were not complete or consistent. Leslie knew in the midst of his pain that his own all-consuming desire for vengeance was blocking the head's hypnotic power. For a long straining moment he stood before the dais, while sweat beaded on his brow and his muscles contracted in agony with the intensity of his effort.

There was nothing now in his mind but blind unswerving hatred. Hatred toward this monstrous ancient evil that existed for its own malignancy, like some hideous creature that nourished on its own venom.

Slowly Leslie raised the tube.

The pressure within him grew until a groan passed his lips. But his arm continued its slow ascent, the muscles struggling to respond to the commands of his raging will.

His wrist moved upward until the tube was pointed squarely at the gross aperture that split the leprous surface of the giant head.

He tried to tighten his finger on the tiny catch; but all his energy was draining off in his fight to hold the arm erect, to keep his brain free from the effects of the head's hypnotic power.

There was not enough strength in his body to move his finger an eighth of an inch, with a hair's breadth of pressure.

He stood immobile before the giant head, knowing in an agony of despair that he was beaten; that in a few seconds the terribly unequal fight would be over, that he would collapse in a faint.

Then from behind he heard a faint moan.

Marcia...

He choked back a cry. The thought that she had been chained up like some beast, tortured to satisfy the whim of this obscene deformity, was like a white-hot flame driving into his body.

Strength from some unknown reserve flooded into his arm. His finger closed on the catch.

FOR AN instant nothing happened. Then the scabrous skin of the head began to shrivel and a noxious odor spread sickeningly through the chamber.

The pressure faded from Leslie's mind, slowly, reluctantly, then was gone forever as the mighty head crumpled and dissolved in gray slime on the dais.

"You've destroyed it!" Joseph Strauss cried. "Intelligence, pure and refined and absolute, and you destroyed it! But it was only one! There are thousands like that here. I will find them, lend them my ability." He stared at Leslie with mad eyes. "I will find them," he cried and, wheeling, raced from the moon.

Leslie turned to the scaffolding and played the tube's ray on the wires that bound Marcia; and then, holding her close, walked toward the doors.

She hugged him tightly and opened her eyes. "I can walk," she said. "I'm —all right. It just started when you came in."

They passed through the great double doors and Leslie set Marcia on her feet. Then he heard a shout. Turning he saw the bounding, energetic figure of Professor Eaton hurrying toward him.

"It's gone, I know," he said, smiling. "I felt it the minute it left. The pressure in my head is gone."

"Yes, it's gone," Leslie said. "That miracle you mentioned must have happened."

"Come with me then, quickly. The

sooner I get off this accursed and decadent planet the happier I'll be.

Young lady, you have quite a young man there. I'll tell you all about him when we get to the ship."

"Hold it!" Leslie said.

"What is it?"

Leslie told him of the man called Joseph Strauss. "He said there were thousands of these creatures on Mercury, and that he was going to find them."

Professor Eaton shook his head slowly. "No, that was the last one. The rulers of Mercury destroyed themselves until only this one was left. It lay dreaming in a stupor for thousands of years until some memory of past greatness awakened it. It started on this ambitious and fantastic plan of repopulating Mercury with slaves from other planets. It was an infinitely refined intellect, with tremendous power and perception. But all its thinking ran to destruction."

"What of Joseph Strauss?"

"We can't look for him," the professor said. "Perhaps he will be happy searching the empty domes of Mercury for another god to worship. And perhaps not. It couldn't matter less."

Within a mile they came to a door that led them outside into the murky gray atmosphere of Mercury. Ahead of them was a giant silver square, its metal walls softly refracting the feeble light of the sun.

"There are only six of us left," Professor Eaton said. "There are three others waiting for us in the square. Let's hurry."

Leslie put his arm about Marcia's waist and they began to run over the spongy ground toward the space ship.

THE END

SUBTERRANEAN LINK

By MILTON MATTHEW

THE FUTURE promises to be in the air. Communication and transportation will eventually, as they are even now, make use of the enormous sea of air. The propeller, the jet and the rocket are the harbingers of coming events.

But men are still locked to Earth. And they have plenty of gadgets for travelling around that surface. And men of vision are summoning up once more, a tremendous dream over a hundred and fifty years old. The dream is the idea of a tunnel under the sea, linking Europe with England!

This mighty undertaking which has been in the actual blueprint stage for a hundred years, is no idle fantasy. It was capable of being accomplished a hundred years ago. And the engineering techniques of today would make it even simpler.

Along the "white cliffs of Dover" and along similar chalky cliffs of France, are still the entrances to shafts which lead to tunnels bored into the rocky floor of the English Channel. These tunnels were started in the seventies and remain today in their uncompleted state as monuments to man's stupidity. For the only reason that the trans-channel tunnel was never built was the inherent fear Europeans seem to have for one another. Both the British and the French have tried to reach an accord—without success.

But today there are groups who think that they can bring about a union. Technologically the tunnel is easy to build and it would cost a mere one hundred and fifty million dollars. The diplomatic and political obstacles are slowly being hurdled by men of good will.

As an engineering project the job will rank with the Panama Canal, the Pyramids and other monumental undertakings. The tunnel itself will be a vast pair of concrete, steel-reinforced tubes bored through solid limestone, ventilated and illuminated and capable of carrying enormous traffic in trains, trucks and cars.

Engineers can so easily change the face of the Earth—and the planets?—and yet they can't seem to change human beings. The chances are that such a project would unite Europe as no other. Futhermore, it would be one great step forward in uniting engineering talents of the world for projects which are bound to come eventually—the colonization of the planets!

HELICOPTOR'S HELPER

By LESLIE PHELPS

HALF THE problem of living is getting from one place to another. Right now the automobile is the swiftest, simplest—though not necessarily safest—way of doing this. As yet there isn't the slightest indication that this situation is going to change—that is, not unless you look beneath the surface.

The helicopter is the answer to the future's problem, of course. This is true even though we hear less about the "Windmill Gadget" than we'd like to. Right now they're trinkets and playboys' toys. But that'll change too. Wait and see.

But the helicopter is not the complete answer. It doesn't seem that the "futurians" should find it necessary to "heli" from one block to another. And then again they might. Just as today we hop in the family car to drive half a block. Never the less we're inclined to suspect that a "secondary vehicle", and all-around buggy will be handy.

This general short-distance work-horse will probably be something all too-familiar today—with slight modifications, the common motor-scooter! Equipped with an electric motor, a 'scooter of this variety would make a convenient simple carry-all to do the short-distance running from one place to another. Today they're using motor scooters for lots of things. Imagine what they could do with the improved variety?

A projection into the future such as we've just suggested isn't really science-fiction or fantasy. Rather it is an extrapolation based on sound reasoning. There is or will be a need—ergo, there is or will be an answer to that need.

And there's one good thing about this prediction—motor scooters won't cause much of a traffic jam with helicopters!

THE FLUID-MAPPER

By DAN CORLISS

THE WORD science conjures up pictures of huge laboratories, gigantic machines, and dozens of men scuttling around, doing research. Because science is such a cooperative effort, especially in the light of present-day complicated machines and abstruse technology, we tend to forget that ideas come from minds—and an idea basically must at least come from one—and only *one*, mind. Consequently one must not be too impressed with all the paraphernalia of the industrial and university laboratories. Men still do the work.

It is refreshing therefore to read of a simple invention or discovery which, in its very simplicity, demonstrates the amazing ability of the human mind. Such a discovery has been announced from the University of Michigan. It concerns the ever-intriguing problem of drawing pictures of the forces which exist in electric and magnetic fields, the way in which heat flows through an object, etc. This problem of drawing these pictures it might be added, is extremely important. As a matter of fact it is one of the major preoccupations of mathematicians and physicists and it is really very difficult. Often it is impossible to do mathematically and recourse must be had to simple methods of trial and error.

The "fluid-mapper" on the other hand is an extraordinarily simple and ingenious device for doing this very thing. It can show the nature of electric and magnetic fields, fluid flow, aerodynamic problems and so on in a matter of minutes.

And all it consists of is a shallow pan full of water, on the bottom of which rests a porous "stone" made from dental plaster and whose shape depends on the nature of the problem. Small crystals of potassium permanganate are then dropped into the water. At one end of the shallow pan is a series of drainage holes. These are opened and the water allowed to drain slowly. The dissolving potassium permanganate crystals (a brilliant purple color) are drawn out into thin lines or streaks which takes the form of stream-lines or lines of flow whose shape depends on the original factors. These purple streaks mark the white surface of the stone, and thus a "picture" of lines of force or flow are easily obtained. And that's all there is to it!

Such a simple process of fixing pictures of force-fields and flow-fields has long been needed. Complicated computations are out and the answer to a lot of problems will be obtained.

The point of the whole thing is that this shows clearly that a man with a brain is worth an awful lot of machinery —and that you don't have to have a super-ultra-hyper-cyclotron to make a scientific discovery!

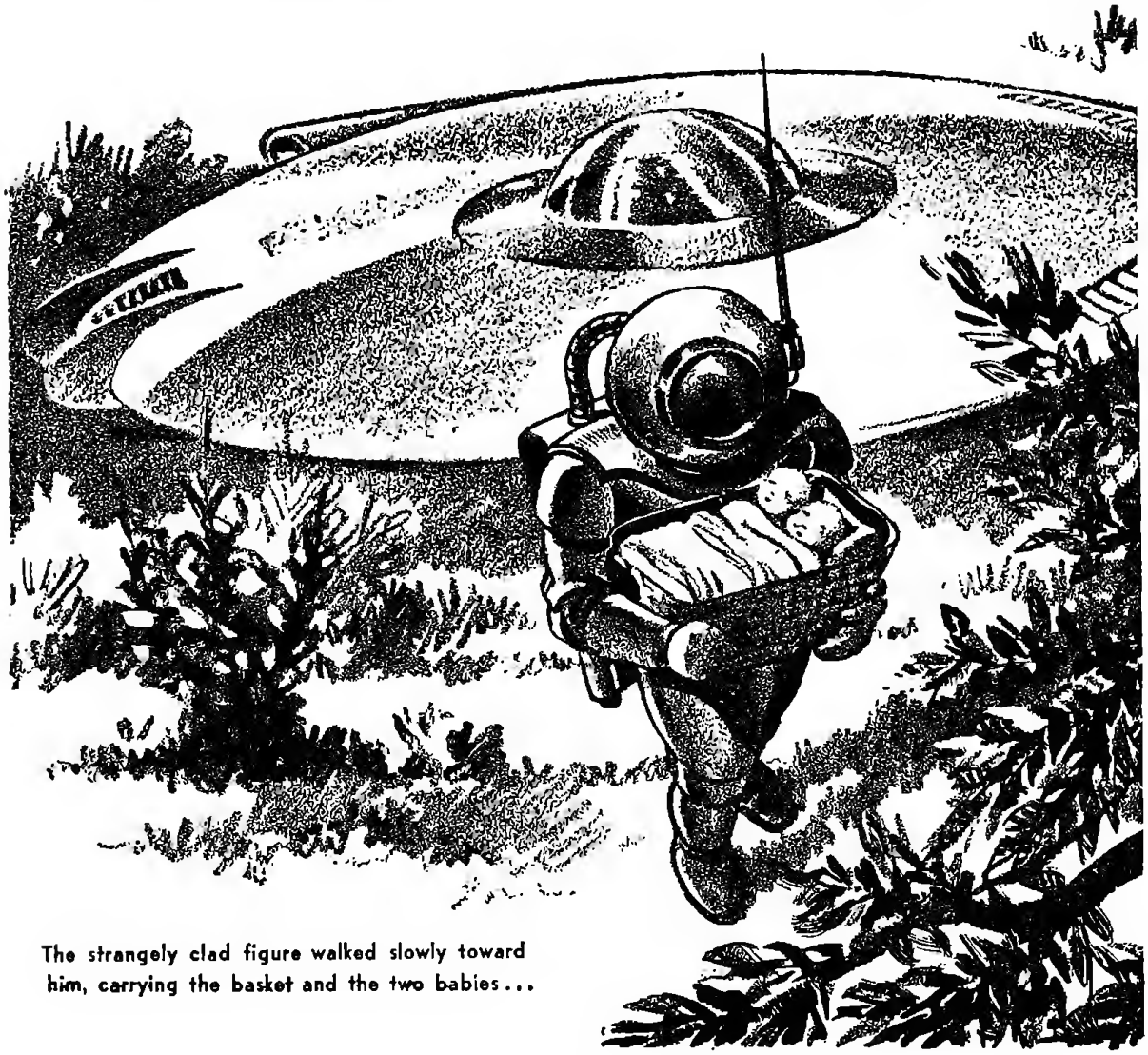
THIS WAY OUT

By Robert Moore Williams

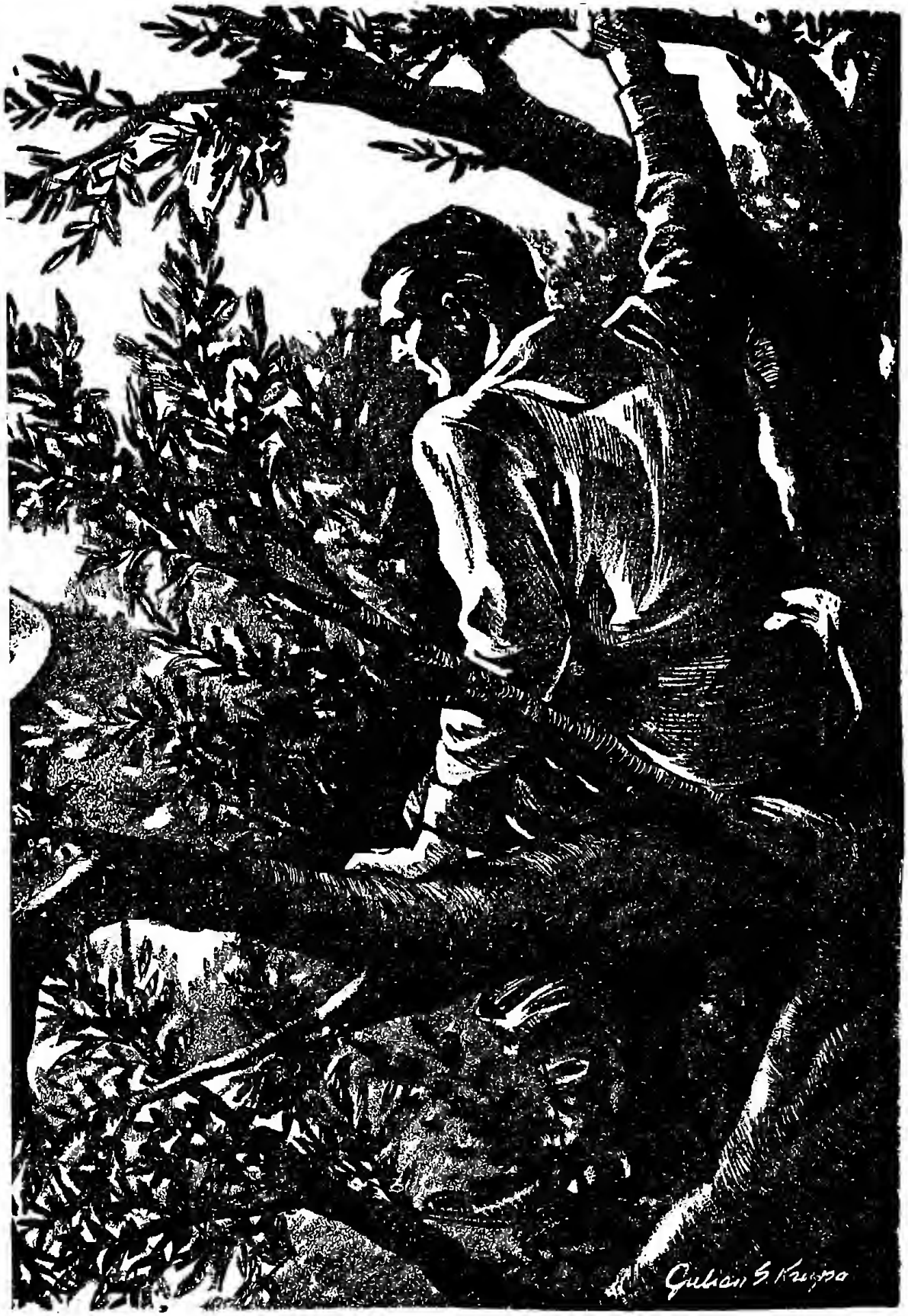
How can you tell a kid crime doesn't pay when he finds it easy to walk through solid walls?

"YOU WAIT here, Jet," the kid, Dennis O'Liam, said.

The man known as Wade Jethro nodded. If he was uneasy, if he was colder than could be accounted for by the chilling autumn rain driven across the night by the slanting northwest wind, he kept all sign of his uneasiness out of his voice and off his face. A service drive led from the alley to the back end of the grocery store. There a flaring electric light threw a



The strangely clad figure walked slowly toward him, carrying the basket and the two babies...


Julian S. Krupa

broad circle of illumination over unloading platforms piled high with empty fruit and vegetable crates. On each side of the driveway was a high board fence. The raindrops came down through the circle of light like miniature space ships hurrying home to earth. Jethro wondered how long it would be before his teeth started chattering. Did anybody ever really become accustomed to this climate? He coughed and the sound was flung back to him by the rising wind.

"You need a warmer coat, Jet," the kid said anxiously.

"I need a lot of things worse than I need a coat," Jethro answered.

The kid was silent for a moment, then his voice came again: "Tomorrow's Saturday, see? This store does a big business on Saturday. They open early and they got to have a lot of money on hand to cash pay checks. Since the banks don't open on Saturday, they get the money in on Friday."

"But it's in the safe," Jethro protested.

The kid spat. "Hell, I know that. Don't let it worry you any, Jet." He was about fifteen years old but he spoke with the calm certainty of a much older person.

"How are you going to open the safe?" Jethro asked.

"That's my worry."

"How are you going to get into the store? The doors are locked, the windows are barred, and there are probably burglar alarms all over the joint."

"I'll get in," Dennis O'Liam said. He seemed very sure of himself.

Hearing that sureness, Jethro shivered involuntarily. His teeth chattered, perhaps from the chill wind and the night, perhaps from some other cause. The kid was instantly sympathetic. "You need a new coat, Jet, you really do. We'll get it tomorrow—tonight, if we get through here in time. A sheep-lined jacket! There's nothing like a sheep-skin-lined coat to keep you warm on winter nights. You can even sleep in it." He was enthusiastic about the idea.

"I'll get along," Wade Jethro said. "You don't need to rob this store just to get a coat for me, Dennis."

"A coat for you is just one of the things I want," the kid answered. "The MacClanahans ain't had any coal in two days and I don't think they've really had much to eat since the old man went on his last bender, over a week ago. Stella was looking mighty thin-faced and peaked this afternoon when I saw her. Of course, she didn't say a n y t h i n g. She wouldn't."

"The old man could go back to work," Jethro said.

"He could, but he won't, not as long as he can get hold of canned heat. Somebody has got to get some beans into them kids."

"But why are you elected to do it? There are agencies—"

"They're friends of mine and I stick by my friends!" the kid said hotly. "And don't tell me anything about these relief agencies. Before they will do anything to help you, they've got to ram their noses up to the hilt in your business. I don't want any help from them, and neither do the MacClanahans." His v o i c e sounded much too bitter for a boy of fifteen.

WHAT experiences lay back of that bitterness? Jethro wondered. He could guess at some of them. Hunger and heartache and despair and plain privation, tissue hunger for proteins, soul hunger for security, for a place in the world.

"But Dennis it isn't—ain't fair to let you burglarize this store for me. Damnit, I'm a grown man."

"Hell, you'll be earning your

share," the kid growled. "You'll be the lookout for me. You'll earn that coat."

"But—"

"It couldn't be you're kicking because you've got a little streak of yellow in you somewhere?" the kid asked. A hard, suspicious note crept into his voice.

"Hell, no!" Jethro answered promptly. Doubled into a fist, his right hand came out of his pocket. "Listen, you smart punk, I'll knock your head off if you try to talk like that!"

The kid laughed. "That's the way to talk, Jet." He wasn't much worried by the threat but he said nothing more about Jethro being yellow and the older man did not force the issue. "I just don't like to have you take any chances, especially when you won't tell me how you're going to get into the store," he said.

"I'm not taking any chances," the kid answered. "I'm going in now. You stay out of sight. When you hear me whistle, like this—" he whistled softly, a thin liquid note that hardly seemed to disturb the air. "—you answer me, if it's all right for me to come out."

"Out of where?" Jethro questioned.

The kid didn't answer. "Remember, I'm depending on you to let me know if the coast is clear before I come out. I can't know, for sure, if everything is all right." He put a lot of emphasis on this point. Jethro took up his position beside a telephone pole in the driveway just off the alley and watched the kid walk away.

The bulb over the back door of the grocery store cast a brilliant glow straight down. The kid, walking straight toward the light, was clearly visible. He was wearing a sock cap and his hands were thrust into the pockets of his coat. Walking with his head thrust forward, his shoulders hunched down, he looked a little like a gnome about some strange business in the night. Jethro, colder than the rain and the wind made necessary, watched him.

Then didn't watch him, didn't see him.

The kid was gone! Gone from sight, gone from the alley, gone from the rain-streaked night. Gone!

Whether there had been a hole in the fence, a board loose or missing, and the kid had slipped through this hole, Jethro could not tell. All he could say for certain was that he had been watching Dennis O'Liam walk down a driveway toward the back door of the grocery store he intended to burglarize, that he had seen the kid, and then suddenly hadn't seen him.

The disappearance had been as subtle as the passing of a raindrop, something that came and went before you saw it.

WADE JETHRO was suddenly shivering and his teeth were chattering in the rising wind. His hand in his pocket wrapped itself around the butt of the gun, he clutched it as if the feel of the weapon was somehow reassuring, something that could be clung to when nothing else was certain. Like a drowning man grabbing at a straw, or a floating branch, Jethro grabbed the gun.

Was this the *tsi* effect in operation?

Or was it something else? Had the kid actually slipped through a hole in the fence?

"I'm not sure," Jethro said to himself. "I've got to be sure. I've got to!" He said it over and over again.

The alley was empty, deserted, and very lonely. He had for company his chattering teeth, raindrops, and wind. Fear was in him, such fear as

he had never known. Or was this fear actually eagerness? He did not know. But he was not ashamed of it, which ever it was. A man who was not afraid now in this moment was not capable of fear.

Wind blew slanting rain across the driveway. Jethrc put his back against the telephone post, pressed hard against it, as if in it he had found a second thing to cling to, a substantial reality in the midst of a night that had suddenly become unreal. He waited.

There was no sound of breaking glass, as he had halfway expected, such a sound as might come from a window being surreptitiously broken. There was no subdued crash of breaking wood, as might come from a door being forced.

There was nothing except the wind blowing rain through the night and the sound of tires rolling on wet pavement on the other side of the store. Somewhere a car honked impatiently. Off in the distance a searchlight fingered into the sky, an advertising stunt—or was it a symbol of the human mind trying to peer into darkness, into the night, seeking to penetrate the fringe of mysteries sensed but not seen?

Behind Jethro a step sounded. He turned slowly.

Light glinting from the black wet slicker, a nightstick thrust under his arm, a policeman stood there.

CHAPTER II

THE COP stood like a statue guarding the night. As if he smelled the presence of wrong-doing and was trying hard to locate the source from which it came, he swung his head slowly from side to side, like a dog trying to pick up a trail in the air.

The pole was between the cop and Wade Jethro. The latter did not move except to press himself closer against the pole. He hoped fervidly that Dennis would not whistle now. The whistle could tell the cop that someone was hiding here and he would come to investigate.

As if he could not quite locate the source of the wrong-doing he thought he smelled, the policeman turned from the driveway and started into the alley.

In another minute he would be gone.

Simultaneously the kid whistled.

Jethro pressed himself hard against the pole, hoping against hope that the cop had not heard the sound. The whistle had a strange quality about it, as if it had come from some great distance. It was both clear and not clear.

The cop heard the whistle. He turned instantly, stood peering down the driveway toward the back of the grocery store. Again he stood like a statue guarding the night. But now the statue was alert, now he knew that someone was near.

Against the post, Jethro cursed silently, all the oaths he knew. He did not blame the kid for whistling. He blamed fate, bad luck, the vagaries of a shifting pattern that had brought a policeman into this alley on this night.

Of course, the cop probably made nightly rounds through this alley, but they should have determined in advance the time of his rounds. They hadn't. And this had happened.

The kid did not whistle again. He was waiting in hiding somewhere for Jethro's whistle telling him the coast was clear.

The cop's flashlight appeared, fingered down the driveway. Jethro hugged the post. The light went past him.

Far off in the windy night a new

sound appeared—the distant wail of a siren. Ambulance, fire truck, or squad car? The sound was coming closer. The cop heard it. He lifted his head to listen. The siren wailed to a halt on the main street directly in front of the grocery store.

The cop, muttering beneath his breath, turned and trotted out of the driveway.

Again the soft whistle sounded. This time Jethro answered it.

"Jet, where are you?" Dennis called. He was coming fast along the alley.

"Here," Jethro answered softly. He had not seen the kid appear but he had no time to wonder about this now.

"Come on, get out of here," Dennis panted. "I tripped a burglar alarm inside the store, one that doesn't ring in the store itself but that lets go an alarm in a private exchange. They call the cops and the cops put it on the air. They get here within minutes that way. Come on, Jet."

The kid was moving fast along the driveway. Jethro followed. They reached the corner, dived into the alley, heading toward the side street.

"Halt!" a voice sounded.

It was the cop. He had run into the main alley and had hid there, certain that the siren would flush from hiding anyone concealed in the vicinity.

"Run like hell!" Dennis O'Liam whispered.

THE KID was a furtive shadow running silently along the alley. Wade Jethro was a bigger shadow who did not run so silently. The cop heard them.

"Halt!" he yelled again.

A gun exploded.

"Keep going," Dennis whispered. "The first shots are always in the air."

Crash! the second shot came.

This time the bullet drove straight down the center of the alley. It passed between the two of them, howling.

"That one wasn't in the air!" Jethro gasped.

"Quick, in here," the kid answered. He ducked to one side, down what looked like a passage leading to the next street. Jethro followed. A sidewalk was under his feet, apparently it was a connecting crosswalk that led between high board fences—

Crash!

In the darkness, Dennis run headlong into a barrier of some kind, apparently a wire gate.

"Are you hurt?" Jethro asked anxiously.

"Just—got the wind—"

The kid was down on the ground. Jethro bent to pick him up. Footsteps sounded in the alley. The kid was gasping for breath. "If he comes in here, shoot him."

"But—"

"You got a gun, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Then shoot him."

Jethro tried to open the gate. It was locked. They had run headlong into a trap. He pulled the gun from his pocket.

The beam of the flashlight came along the walk, outlining them with blinding radiance.

"Get your hands up!"

Jethro was caught and he knew it. He lifted his hands in a waving motion that tossed the gun over the fence. Better not to be caught with a gun in his possession. The cop approached.

"Get your hands up, both of you."

"I've got my hands up. Dennis, do what the policeman says."

There was no answer. Jethro suddenly realized he was alone in this passageway.

In that moment, he almost forgot about the policeman. Dennis O'Liam was gone. Gone from this closed pas-

sage, gone silently, gone in a way that no one had ever used before. Jethro hardly realized what was happening when the cop put handcuffs on him.

"Where's the other one?" the cop demanded.

"What are you talking about?" Jethro began again to get his wits about him.

"The other one, who ever it was with you."

"Are you crazy? There wasn't anyone with me. I just stepped into the alley for a personal reason when you started hollering and shooting. What's coming off when an honest citizen can't step into an alley—" He didn't really expect to be believed. And he wasn't.

"Aw, shut up!" the cop said. "You come along with me."

THE POLICE searched the neighborhood. They found the gun. When the owner of the grocery store arrived and checked the safe, they discovered that over seven hundred dollars was missing. Under these circumstances, they put Jethro in the back of the squad car and took him to the police station.

But they didn't book him right away. After all, the missing money had not been found in his possession. The gun had been on the other side of the fence and while they suspected he had thrown it there, they couldn't prove he had. While he had no record in their files, the whole situation added up to one conclusion—that he was a two-bit crook who had blown in from out of town, maybe he was a small-time burglar, maybe he specialized in grocery-store hold-ups, they didn't know what he did, but whatever it was, it wasn't important. He was just another damned nuisance on his way to get himself a record for petty offenses.

This was the way they characterized Wade Jethro. They knew just exactly what to do with him and about him, to beat him up so badly that he would shiver the next time he saw a policeman. "When you can't convict 'em of anything important, run 'em out of town," was the motto of this police department.

They tood Jethro to a back room and a plainclothes man with a face that looked as if he had been run over by a coal truck told him to sit down.

He knew exactly what was coming. He didn't like it. Reaching into his pocket, he unpinned the little badge and held it in the palm of his hand.

At the sight of that badge, the plainclothes man did a fast double-take. He looked at it, looked again, then looked at Jethro as if he did not believe his eyes.

"Sometimes you damned fools catch something in a back alley that you're not looking for and don't know how to handle," Jethro said. "Sometimes a damned idiot who looks exactly like you is going to interfere in matters so far above his head that he has no idea whatsoever of them—and get himself kicked right in the face."

Probably the plainclothes man did not understand half of what he heard —the words were beyond grasp—but he got the main idea.

"Huh?"

"Take this badge to your captain."

"Huh? I mean—maybe we made a mistake—"

"You're making it bigger every time you open your mouth. Take this badge to your captain." Jethro had changed, somehow, very suddenly. His voice had become hard and crisp, the tone commanding. The plainclothes man took the badge and hurried from the room. Jethro sat in the chair and waited. The plainclothes man returned in a few minutes. "The captain will see you at once, sir," he said. He practically bowed Jethro out of the

room.

THE CAPTAIN was a big man with a great thatch of almost pure white hair. The plainclothes man introduced them. The captain got up to shake hands. He offered Jethro a chair and a cigar. The little badge was lying in the middle of his desk. The captain's gaze went wonderingly over Jethro. "This badge says FBI—NSD," he said. "I understand the FBI part, but the NSD I don't get."

"Federal Bureau of Investigation—National Security Division," Jethro answered. "Call the local offices of the FBI. They will explain it to you."

"Sure, sure, I would have to check anyhow," the captain said fretfully. He picked up a phone, dialed a number. Describing the badge and Wade Jethro minutely, he held a lengthy conversation with someone on the other end of the wire. Finally he hung up.

"They say there are some NSD men in town, but they don't know what they're doing here."

"I called in to let them know I was here," Jethro said.

"They also said they would take orders from you," the captain continued. There was wonder and a trace of awe in his voice.

"They will do just that," Jethro said. "The question is—will you?"

The captain twisted uneasily in his chair. "Hell, man, the boys picked you up near the scene of a burglary. Somebody was with you, but you refused to name him."

"Do you want me to name him?"

"Of course. We're willing to cooperate with the government men but we want a little co-operation in return. At least, we would like to know what the hell is going on, so we can keep our noses clean."

"The person with me was Dennis O'Liam," Jethro said.

"No!" the captain said. The tone of his voice said that he wished now he hadn't been told who was with this NSD agent. Irritation settled itself in a heavy clamp on his face. "Is that screwball kid loose again? We sent him to the reformatory—"

"He got out," Jethro said.

The expression on the captain's face said that he would just as soon have learned that the devil was loose in his precinct. "Did he burglarize that store?"

"I'm not going to appear as a witness against him."

"I didn't ask you that, I asked you if he had burglarized the store?"

"I didn't see him do it," Jethro answered. He lifted his hand, to halt this line of questioning. "Please, captain, there is more at stake here than simple burglary."

"I guess there must be, if your outfit is in on it," the captain ruminated. "But that kid just beats hell out of me. We've had him in this station ten times if we've had him in here once, charged with everything from breaking glass in automobiles to burglary. We made the last burglary charge stick because we caught him with the money on him, and for once, he didn't get loose from us—"

"I gather he has gotten loose from you pretty regularly. How does he do it?"

"I wish I knew!" Baffled anger showed on the captain's face. He balled his hand into a fist and brought it down heavily on the top of his desk. "Do you know that at least twice the boys have picked him up and put him in the paddy wagon and started him toward the station—and when they got here, he wasn't in the wagon?"

"It sounds like a good trick. Didn't you have a man riding in the back with him?"

"Not those two times we didn't.

We finally learned that the only way we could bring him in was to put cuffs on him and cuff him to an officer."

"Um," Jethro said.

"And that's not all." An expression of disbelief settled on the captain's face as if his features were trying to say he personally did not believe what he was going to say, and that he didn't expect the NSD agent to believe it, but he was going to say it anyhow. "The boys brought him in one night. for chunking half a brick at one of them, and being sassy in general, and I personally locked him in a cell. I picked out our very best cell, one that has held some mighty big hot-shots safely." He paused as if he could not bring himself to say this after all.

"And what happened?" Jethro encouraged.

"The next morning that there cell was empty! The kid was gone."

Jethro sat very still beside the desk. Evidence such as this, plus what he already had, was almost incontrovertible. Suddenly he saw everything. Hope pounded in him as powerful as the beat of a rising tide. He pushed the tide down. In this matter, he had to be certain, he had to be sure. "How do you think he got out?" he questioned.

"At first, I thought somebody had turned him out. I took the whole blamed staff here, from the desk sergeant right on down to the turnkeys, and put every man of them back to pounding a beat. Then I brought in a new set. Then I brought Dennis in and again locked him in a cell." He shook his head. His voice dropped to a whisper. "He wasn't there the next morning."

"Houdini could do the same trick," Jethro said.

"Not out of my cells, Houdini couldn't!" the captain roared.

CHAPTER III

THE NEXT morning, Wade Jethro was discharged from the police station. He spent the night in a cell and he could have been discharged the night before, if he had requested, but the normal routine would have been to discharge him the next morning. He preferred to stick by normal routine, so that Dennis would have no reason to suspect him of being what he was. The police gave him back his gun and his badge and he carefully pinned the latter out of sight in his pocket.

He went immediately to that section of the city where Dennis O'Liam lived. It lay along the bank of the river below the main city. Railroad tracks ran through it, freight trains thundered through this section at all hours, passengers in observation cars of crack streamliners wondered what manner of people lived in this collection of huts, tents, half-tents, crazy houses made of tin cans flattened out and nailed on boards, houses made out of car siding, tar-paper roofing, anything. Whatever could be stolen, whatever could be carried away, whatever could be found along the railroad tracks, was used to build houses here.

In other days, this section had been called Hooverville, but it had existed long before Mr. Hoover had been president of the country, and it continued to exist long after he had passed from the political scene.

Here was trouble's home. here was the last outpost of life itself, here the big problem was to stay alive. Here the problem was not respectability, the problem was to find enough to eat, coal to burn in a wretched huddle of iron that you call a stove, and enough clothes to ward off the fiercer blasts of the stinging winter wind.

Here was thievery and the drinking

of canned heat, here was the smoking of marijuana and the taking of cocaine, if you could come by it. Here was destitution and despair, here you drank yourself into insensibility as often as you could in the hope that while you were insensible, you might stumble under a freight train or fall from the bank into the flooded river —and die and not have to face tomorrow.

Here was the home of Dennis O'Liam.

Hooverville stretched for blocks along the bank of the river, a vast collection of huts threatening to fall down. There were no proper streets, instead there were lanes, like runways for rabbits in a briar patch. In this brew of misery, Dennis O'Liam was more of a hero than ever Robin Hood had been in Sherwood Forest, though for the same basic reasons.

WALKING ACROSS the railroad tracks and entering the fringe of the district, Jethro saw one reason why Dennis was a hero here. Kids, playing in the littered runway that passed as a street, scattered in front of him. They knew him, he knew them, they were the MacClanahans. He saw Stella watching him. Unlike the others in this litter, tow-headed and round-faced, she was thin faced; and her hair was black and straight. What cuckoo had laid this egg in the MacClanahan nest, he wondered? It did not matter. All nine of the kids were in the street this morning, ranging from Stella, the oldest, to the baby, who was just learning to toddle. They were always dirty, always noisy, always ragged. This morning they were dirtier than usual. But the dirt was concentrated on their faces. Jethro saw that the dirt was actually chocolate. From the baby up to Stella, their faces were smeared with it. An empty five-pound candy box lay in the street. The baby was rooting in the second box. Jethro grinned at them and walked on past.

The action was typical of Dennis O'Liam, to steal money to buy food for a raft of hungry kids, and then instead of the hamburger and the bread and milk they so obviously needed, to buy them chocolate candy instead.

Jethro went in the back door of the shack where Dennis lived. The kid's mother was dead, his father was unknown; he lived here alone. For the past week, Wade Jethro had lived with him.

Dennis was buried under the covers of the cot, sound asleep. Pulled out of its wrappings and tossed across the back of a chair, was a brand new sheepskin coat.

At the sound of Jethro's entry, Dennis instantly awakened.

"Hi, Jet," he called out. "There's your coat." He waved an arm toward the chair.

"I see it," Jethro answered. "It looks like a dandy. Thanks."

"I got it at an army goods store last night. It's a flyer's coat and it ought to be warm. How'd you get loose from the cops?"

"They didn't have any real evidence against me."

"You didn't get beat up any." The kid surveyed him with a critical eye.

"I was lucky," Jethro answered. "Is there anything to eat?"

"Some bread and beer sausage."

"Thanks." Jethro moved toward the littered table at the rear of the room, cut himself a slice of beer sausage and slipped it between two slices of bread. "How'd you get away last night?" His voice was casual to the point of indifference.

"You mean, when the cop had us cornered?"

"Yeah."

The kid seemed to meditate. Jethro was holding his breath but he was taking pains to conceal the fact. He speared another slice of beer sausage, munched heartily. "Good sausage, this."

"I went the back way," the kid said.

Jethro ate beer sausage. "The *back way?* What's that?"

"That's what I call it," Dennis answered. He was still in the bed with the quilt drawn up tight around him.

"I don't get it," Jethro said. "Is that the way you got out of the cell at the police station?"

"Huh? How'd you know about that?"

"They were talking about you, at the station. I overheard 'em. Did you get into the store the same way?"

"Yeah."

"How do you work this *back way* trick?"

THE KID'S casual manner was a solid imitation of Jethro. "I don't really know. You're asking a hell of a lot of questions, Jet? Why don't you just let things ride?"

"Am I?"

"Yeah. Especially for a guy who spends the night in the police station and comes back without even a black eye. Jet, you wouldn't be a damned dick, would you?"

"Huh?" Jethro's mouth hung open.

"Because I hate dicks, I hate 'em worse than I hate anything else on earth, except maybe cops. And if you're one—" The kid flung back the covers and swung his feet over the edge of the cot. He had a gun in his hand and he had had it there all along, hidden under the covers. He didn't point the gun but his voice was hard and flat. "Are you a dick?"

"Shut up!" Jethro answered. "You make me sick at my stomach."

"Are you a damned dick?" The kid's voice had become a high falsetto.

"Yes," Jethro answered. For a moment he thought the kid was going to use the gun. The kid's face was wild. Wade Jethro continued to munch bread and beer sausage. "But not the kind you think," he said quietly. "I'm not going to put you in jail or send you back to the reformatory. I'm not interested in the burglary you committed last night, or in any other burglary."

"You're not?" Dennis O'Liam seemed to find this hard to believe.

"No," Jethro said.

"What kind of a dick are you?"

"A kind you never heard of before." The kid was confused and doubtful, he could see. But he could also see that Dennis was becoming curious—for the same reason the police captain had become curious. What would a detective want with him, if not to question him for wrong-doing?

"You're telling the truth when you say you're not going to send me back to the reform school?"

"Absolutely."

"Then what do you want with me?"

"I'll tell you. But first—where are you going?"

Dennis had risen swiftly from the cot. He moved to the window, in which the single remaining pane of glass made a sort of peephole through which to view the activities on the runway outside. A little tinge of fear shot through Jethro. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"I thought I heard a noise," Dennis answered. "Somebody was around here last night looking for me."

"How do you know?"

"Stella told me."

"What did he look like?"

"They said he was a tall man with a face like a hog."

"A face like a hog—" In Wade Jethro fear rose again.

"Do you know who he is?"

"I'm not sure. What did the kids say about him?"

"Just that he came here last night looking for me."

"What did they tell him?"

"What do you think they told him? That they had never heard of me! They're my friends. They wouldn't tell nobody anything about me until they had asked me first. Stella was here waiting for me when I got back last night, to tell me about him."

Jethro conceived a sudden fondness for the MacClanahan kids. As a warning system, they were excellent—and well worth all the candy they cost. Dennis O'Liam came away from the window. He stood looking up at Wade Jethro. There was no threat on his pinched face, only curiosity. "What do you really want with me?"

"I want to know how you got into that grocery store last night."

"I thought so."

"Are you willing to tell me?" Every ounce of persuasion he possessed, he put into the tone of his voice.

DENNIS O'LIAM already had his mind made up. "Yes—providing you will tell me why you want to know."

"That's fair," Jethro answered. "I'll tell you—but it will have to be after you tell me."

"How do I know you'll tell me?"

Jethro pointed toward the gun the kid still held. "You've got that. If I don't play fair, use it."

The kid's eyes widened. "Do you mean it?"

"I mean it. How did you get into the grocery store?"

"I told you once—the back way."

"But that doesn't tell me anything really, it's just words with no real meaning. I watched you walk down the driveway toward the store. Suddenly I didn't see you any more. What happened when I didn't see you?"

"I guess maybe that was where I went into the back way," Dennis answered.

"And then what happened?"

"I walked into the store."

"Through the wall?"

"Yes." The answer was given calmly, with no hint of restraint. So far as Jethro could tell, Dennis O'Liam might have been answering a question about the weather. With equal calmness, Wade Jethro ignored the answer. "What's the back way like?" he said.

"It's hard to tell," Dennis answered. His face wrinkled into a frown. "It's kinda misty. Things like walls and doors and other solid things get sorta like clouds. I can walk right through them."

"The *tsi* effect!" Cold was on Jethro, such cold as he had never known. This—this ought to prove everything. But did it? Was he sure? What if the kid was lying? "Do you know what the back way really is?" he said.

"I—I guess I don't really know, Jet."

"How did you discover it?"

"Well—"

Jethro was too excited to wait for an answer. "Dennis, what is your earliest memory?"

"I don't understand, Jet?"

"What is the earliest picture you have in your mind, the first thing you can remember?"

The kid's face reflected his bewilderment. Jethro swore under his breath. "Excuse me, Dennis, I'm a fool. I'm going about this the wrong way. I'll try it another way. I'll say a word and you answer just as fast as you can with the first word that comes into your mind. Do you get it?"

"Well—

"It's like this. If I say 'cat', what would be the first word that came into your mind?"

"Dog, I guess."

"Good. This is called an association test and the answers may be pretty important. But most important is for you to answer as fast as you can, without waiting to think. Are you willing to try this test?"

"What are you trying to find out, Jet?"

"Who and what you are. Ready?"

"I guess so."

"Boy."

"Girl."

"Run."

"Hide."

"Father."

Silence. Dennis tried to think. He had no answer.

"Sky."

"Fire." Something of triumph showed on the kid's face, then the triumph was gone. Pain replaced it.

"Did you ever see the sky on fire, Dennis?"

"Well, I— No. It seems I have, but I can't remember."

"Do you remember a time when you did not live here?"

THE KID stared at him. The eyes were blank. Back of them something groped as if the mind behind the eyes was trying to recall sights the eyes had once seen. "I—I can't remember. It seems that once I lived somewhere else—but I don't know where it was. Everything was bright then. . . ."

He identified the sky with brightness and he knew how to use the *tsi* force but he did not know what it was. To the mind of Wade Jethro, the evidence was almost indisputable. "Dennis, do you know what you are?" he said.

"No," the kid answered.

"Do you know what I *think* you are?"

"How could I know, I'm not a mind reader?"

Wade Jethro hesitated. How could he talk, how could he say what had to be said? How could he find words to express the blinding truth? He was not sure yet, some links in the chain were missing? Did he know the truth? He suspected he knew only a part of it, that much of it remained obscure, a hidden pattern with twists and turns and motivations he could not discern, but the truth he could see disturbed every atom of his mind. He could hear the alarms passing now, from molecule to molecule, from molecule to atom, through the dark and twisting recesses of his brain, each atom and each molecule catching the alarm and echoing it. He took a deep breath.

"Dennis, did you ever hear of the flying saucers?"

CHAPTER IV

"THE FLYING saucers? Them things everybody was seeing a few years ago?"

"They've been seen, off and on, for more than a few years. We have one account, ignored at the time but thoroughly explored later, which goes back fifteen years."

"Fifteen years. That's how old I am."

"Exactly." Grimness crept into Jethro's tone. "Fifteen years ago, not too many miles from here, a farmer rising early one morning found that something strange had appeared in his back pasture over night. Approaching it through the woods, he thought it was an airship of some kind, but later investigation—years later in this case —revealed that it must have been what was later called a flying saucer, one of the large disks, not the small ones. He said it was about a hundred feet in diameter, that it was kind of flat, that it had no wings, that it had rows of openings at the back—in short, his description tallies very close with much more recent descriptions

made by competent observers. So far as we know, this is the only authentic instance of a flying saucer ever being seen on the ground."

The kid twisted uneasily. "What does all this have to do with me?"

"I'm coming to what it has to do with you. The farmer said that as he approached the ship, he saw somebody emerge from it and move toward him. Since he was alarmed, without knowing exactly why, he climbed a tree with thick foliage, hid himself there. He swears the creature from the saucer passed directly under him. He says it was so bundled in heavy clothing that he could not tell much about it, that it was wearing a mask of some kind, with a tube attached to a cylinder at its back—apparently to supply the creature with some gas it needed but which was lacking in our atmosphere. The farmer says this creature was carrying a basket and that in this basket were two living infants. He says he saw them move and heard them cry."

The kid's face was a twisted mask. Jethro's voice dropped almost to a whisper. "That farmer is still alive. I have talked to him. I would bet my life that he isn't lying. He says the creature was gone for almost an hour. When it returned, it had the basket, but it didn't have the two infants. Dennis, to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I have spent much time and effort in checking this story, *you were one of the infants in that basket.*"

"Gee whiz, Jet," the awed kid whispered. "Then that means I'm—"

"Not human," Wade Jethro said.

The kid breathed heavily but made no sound.

"Haven't you ever wondered whether or not you were a human being?"

"Well, something. But it seemed silly."

"Did you ever think that perhaps non-human creatures might appear on this earth?"

"Well, I've read some magazines that kinda gave me the idea. But why would these creatures from the saucer do anything like this, Jet? If they could land here at all, it would be much easier for them just to land—"

"Perhaps they can land but can they stay alive after they landed. Remember how the farmer said the creature was dressed, how it wore a gas mask? Maybe they made several exploratory trips to this planet, took air samples, checked the gravitation, soil, water, radiation, amount and kind of sunlight, and discovered that adults of their species could not live here. *But maybe they could condition children so the children could live here, so they could grow up here, if they were brought here as infants*! Maybe that's the only way they could get a real foothold on this planet, by sending infants here and letting them grow up!" The detective's voice vibrated with the impact of the idea.

"But wouldn't the children die?" Dennis protested.

"Probably many of them did die. But some of them might have been found and been adopted by human mothers, raised by them, taught what foods to eat and what to avoid, taught the patterns of human life and human conduct, taught the thousand and one things they need to know to live here, taught all this by human mothers, who discovered foundlings on their doorstep some morning."

THE KID twisted from foot to foot. "And you think this happened to me?"

"I'm almost convinced of it. I see no other solution."

"But I *look* human."

"Certainly. Any successful animal

will look a lot like a human being simply because the human form is the one possible shape that permits an animal to do all the things it has to do in order to be successful. The fact that you look like a human being doesn't prove anything. The fact that you can use what you call the *back way* does prove something. Do you know what the *back way* actually is, Dennis?"

A shake of the head was his answer.

"It is either a dimensional transit or a time transit, or both. You go outside of time and space, outside the continuum, as we know it, in order to achieve this result. No human being has this function. Did you ever see a human being who could get into a locked store and out again without going through either a door or a window?"

"N-o."

"But *you* can do it."

The kid was silent, his face blank, his eyes alert and alive with conjecture. He still had the gun though he had apparently long since forgotten all about it. "If this is true, I'm not human. But you are human, Jet. The question in my mind is— What would a human being do when he discovers that I'm not like him?" Muscles moved in his hand as he tightened his grip on the gun.

"In my case, welcome you with open arms," Wade Jethro answered. "No, Dennis, you don't have to worry about me." He broke off as a shadow moved past the window and a quick knock sounded on the door. The knock was twice repeated, a signal of some kind. Dennis went quickly to open the door.

It was the girl, Stella, who entered. She looked questioningly at Jethro, then her eyes sought Dennis O'Liam. Some communication seemed to pass between them.

"What is it, Stella? Jet's all right. You can speak up."

"He's coming back, Dennis, the man who was looking for you last night. I just saw him crossing the railroad tracks."

"The man with the face like a hog?" Jethro asked quickly.

"Yes," the girl answered. She pointed through the window. "There he comes now."

Jethro took one look through the window and swore under his breath.

"Who is he, Jet? What does he want?" Dennis asked quickly. "He's not another saucer man, is he?"

"No. Dennis, you and Stella get out of sight. He's certain to come in here. But I'll get him away as quickly as I can."

Under the coat was a hole in the wall, which led to an adjoining shed. From there, they could slip into one of the runways, or, if they wished, they could stay in the shed.

They went through the hole like rabbits ducking out of sight at the approach of a hound.

FROM THE table Jethro swept the half-eaten sandwich. He had forgotten all about it until now. He was sitting at the table eating the sandwich when the stranger peered through the window. When the knock came, he went to answer the door.

"Hello, Jethro," the man at the door said.

"H'lo, Wilkinson," Jethro said. He squinted at the other's outfit, which looked as if it had been picked out of some rag barrel. "Good job they're doing in supply these days. Or did you actually get those clothes from a trash can?"

"I got 'em from supply," Wilkinson answered. "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for the kid," Jethro answered, munching beer sausage. "You got something on your mind?"

"I've got a lot on my mind. A message has come down from the chief." He stuck his head inside the shack, looked around, then hastily stepped outside.

Jethro laughed. "Those old-maid tastes for good housekeeping will be the end of you some day."

"Have you been living here?"

"Sure, for a week."

"Well, you might have cleaned the place up a little."

"And get myself a reputation for being the cleanest man in Hooverville. In Rome, you got to live like the Romans."

"Well, I don't like it. Is there some place where we can talk. I've got news for you."

"Talk? Sure. Come in here. If the kid turns up while you're here, I'll introduce you as a pal on the jump from the law."

"In there!" Wilkinson wrinkled his nose. "Isn't there some other place?"

"We could take a walk down by the river," Jethro said casually.

"It would at least be cleaner there."

The river was in flood. A great tide of sullen yellow water was flowing past. Willows grew along the bank, their drooping limbs reaching down in the swirling yellow flood. Out in the current whole trees could be seen floating by, and the bloated carcasses of cattle.

"She's sure in flood," Jethro said. "What's up?"

"The chief wants a definite yes or no answer about this kid," Wilkinson replied.

Jethro laughed, a harsh sound. "They don't want much! Yes on what angle, no on what angle?"

"Yes or no on all angles. First, can he actually get into locked buildings, into closed vaults, through solid walls, through concrete and steel? The chief probably hasn't been sleeping good of nights, thinking of that kid maybe walking into some of the private vaults at headquarters."

Jethro laughed again. This man did look like a hog and this man reminded him of somebody. He was never able to recall who it was. "Who in the hell had this pipe dream in the first place?" he said.

"Then there's nothing to it?" Wilkinson said, doubtfully.

"Yeah, there's something to it, but not enough to give the NSD ants in their pants. The kid isn't going to get into any of their private vaults, where the H-bomb plans and the private papers for bacteriological warfare are hidden."

"Good," Wilkinson said. But there was no conviction in his voice. "The chief will rest easier when he hears this." He frowned. "There was a report of burglary last night. Police say entry was not forced and the safe had not been opened. But money was missing. It was reports like this that got us into this investigation, you know."

"I know," Jethro answered. "The burglary last night wasn't forced entry. Entrance to the building was achieved by a plain ordinary key. The key ring was swiped for a few minutes while the owner wasn't looking, a wax impression was made, the key ring was returned before it was missed, a key was made—click, click." He made sounds with his tongue symbolizing the turning of a key in a lock.

"How about the safe?"

"The owner had the combination written on the wall—so he wouldn't forget it," Jethro answered easily.

"You seem to know a lot about this," Wilkinson said.

"I vas der, Cholly," Jethro answered.

"I see," Wilkinson said.

JETHRO waited, watched. Again he had the impression, stronger than ever before, that he had known this

man somewhere. He had worked with him on this case, but— "Were you born on a farm, Wilky?" he asked.

"Huh? Yes. What about the way this kid escapes?"

"Everybody who ducks out the side door when the cops are asleep is an escape artist—according to the cops." Jethro answered. "Did you raise hogs when you were a boy?"

"Yeah, sure, fine ones. Took the prize at the county fair." Wilkinson seemed to swell a little, then he came back to the subject. "What about this story that he might have come here on a flying saucer?"

Jethro thrust his hands deep in his coat pockets and teetered on his toes. He looked at the river boiling past below them. His voice came. "I swear they must have a whole department full of fantasy writers somewhere in the Pentagon. All this department does is dream up fantastic yarns for poor hard-working FBI and NSD agents to run down. Did you ever hear a story that sounded more like pure cock-and-bull than this one?"

Wilkinson laughed, a little uneasily. His eyes were evasive. "I guess you're right, when you come to think of it." He took something from his pocket, a round ball of metal, tossed it into the air, caught it. "Did you ever see anything like this before?"

Jethro took it, turned it in his hands. It looked and felt like it was made of solid aluminum. It was about three inches in diameter. "Can't say that I have. Where'd you get it?" His voice was as cold as the north wind.

"Found it in the kid's shack last night."

"You were in his place?"

"Yeah. I thought I had better look it over. This is all I found that might mean anything and I'm damned if I know what it means. It seems that I've seen one of these somewhere before—but I can't remember where." He frowned, a look of concentration appeared on his face.

"Did you ever throw one into a pig pen?" Jethro questioned.

Light blazed in Wilkinson's eyes. "Say, that's it. I just remembered. That damned kid kept pestering me with it and I threw it into—"

A look of satanic hatred appeared on Jethro's face. His pocket exploded.

Wilkinson was standing with his back to the river bank. Both men were concealed in the willows. The drop down the bank to the sullen flood of water was at least five feet. The heavy bullet, catching Wilkinson in the chest, knocked him backward into the river.

He splashed heavily as he hit, his head broke the surface, and he yelled once. The current caught him, carried him under the willows. He clutched at the green limbs, caught them, held on.

His forehead made a round white target above the brown flood.

Jethro took slow aim at that target and pressed the trigger again. A round hole appeared in the middle of the white forehead.

The fingers clutching the willows let go their hold. The head went under water. It did not appear again. Jethro watched to make certain.

AS HE WATCHED and as the head did not appear again, something of the look of satanic hatred went slowly from Wade Jethro's face. He slipped the gun back into his pocket. Tossing the aluminum ball in his hands, he went slowly through the willows and up the bank to the collection of wretched buildings that had once been called Hooverville, entered the shack where Dennis O'Liam lived.

"Okay, kids, you can come out now," he said.

They were slow in appearing from the hole under the coat. He called again and when they did not answer,

lifted the covers dragging on the floor and poked into the hole itself.

"Dennis. Stella."

They did not answer.

Startled, he went quickly to the back door, intending to look in the shed.

They were just coming through the runway. They saw him, tried to duck out of sight, realized they had been seen, and came slowly and hesitantly through the back door. Their faces were white. They did not speak. He made room for them to pass him and when they were inside, he closed the door.

"I've been telling Stella what you told me," Dennis said.

"Damn it—" For a moment anger boiled in him. He forced it out of sight and shook his head. "Sometimes it's a good idea not to talk too much. You can get yourself a reputation for being an awful liar if you say the wrong things at the wrong time to the wrong people."

Dennis O'Liam nodded as if he understood all too well what was meant. "But Stella is different," he said.

Jethro nodded. "There's always somebody who is different—usually it's a girl." He gazed thoughtfully at Stella. "I hope you haven't paid too much attention to the—ah—kind of crazy talk of Dennis."

"But she's different," Dennis said again.

"How is she different?" Jethro demanded.

"Do you remember—" Something of triumph showed on the boy's face. "—What the farmer said? There were *two* babies in the basket?"

"What?" Sudden shocking chill shot through the detective as he realized the implication back of the boy's words. "You don't mean it, you can't mean it, you don't know what you're talking about—"

"But I do mean it," Stella spoke. "Everybody knows I'm not really a MacClanahan. I was found too, like Dennis." Her thin face glowed as she spoke.

"But that doesn't mean anything. There are thousands of babies found on doorsteps every year."

"I can prove it," the girl insisted.

"Don't give me any fairy stories!" he shouted at them. "How can you prove anything?"

"But there had to be two of us," Dennis insisted. "Just one wouldn't be enough. There had to be two, so we could marry, and produce our own kind here on this planet." He seemed very sure.

The logic of the statement seemed to Jethro to be beyond question. There had been two babies. There would have to be. "But that still doesn't prove—" His voice went into silence.

THE GIRL was bringing something out of the pocket of the ragged red sweater she was wearing. He stared at it. It was an aluminum ball similar to the one Wilkinson had found in this shack.

"Proof?" he muttered. But how would they know this was proof? It had taken him years of patient work to discover that this was proof.

"Proof?" he muttered. His eyes were wary. From his pocket, he took the ball that Wilkinson had found.

"That's mine, sir," Dennis said quickly. "I mean—" He fell silent.

Jethro pointed angrily toward the ball the girl was holding. "How can that be proof of anything?"

"We were hoping," Dennis said, "that you could tell us this."

As the implications back of the words sank home in his mind, Jethro slowly lowered himself into a rickety chair. "Okay, kids," he said quietly. "You've got me. Give me the ball, Stella."

She gave it without reluctance now. He examined it carefully, turning it in his hands. Then he put both balls on the table top, shoving aside the beer sausage and the loaf of bread, brought them carefully into a proper relationship. Then he pressed carefully on top of both balls. They clicked open. Revealed inside was a microscopic assembly of instruments.

"Each contains half of a radio transmitter," he said. "One won't work without the other. In fact, neither will open unless the other is also within a six inch distance of it and n the proper position. There are built-in interlocking magnetic fields that prevent them from opening unless both are present."

"But—" the boy frowned.

"Their purpose? Simple. They are to be used to report an accomplished mission. By the time you could accomplish that mission, you would have discovered what they were and how to use them. They contain ultra high frequency radio transmitters, of a type unknown on earth. They will contact a receiver somewhere in space, where, I can't tell you exactly, but probably on one of the planets."

"Then we are to use them?" Dennis said. "Now?"

"Not yet," Jethro answered. "You have only accomplished half your mission. You can't accomplish the second half—" He stared at them, judging swiftly the signs of maturity on them. "—for another five or six years."

"You mean when we have married and had children?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"Then we will have a little foothold on this planet, not much of a foothold, but one that will grow and will enable us to establish regular communication with others elsewhere."

"I see," Dennis said.

"How did you know this ball might prove anything?" Jethro questioned.

"Well—" The boy did not want to speak.

"Go on," Jethro urged.

"Well, it seemed important. We thought it was one of the reasons you—" Again he hesitated. "You shot the detective, sir, to keep him from finding out about the ball."

"I THOUGHT you'd seen that," Jethro said. "You were in the willows?"

"Yes, sir." The answer came without hesitation and without fear.

"That was only one reason why I shot him," Jethro said slowly. "Another reason was the fact that he didn't believe it was all a hoax, your origin, your escapes, and everything else about you. No matter what I said or did, he would have reported that in his opinion more was involved here than had been revealed. His report would have meant more investigation. I want investigation in this area stopped entirely. So I shot him. Now my report will stop inquiries."

"I see," Dennis said.

"And that means no more use of the *tsi* effect," Jethro growled. "None whatsoever. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," Dennis answered promptly. "Stella has already been trying to get me to stop usiny the *back way*. I won't use it any more, sir, without permission."

"See that you don't," Jethro said. "It is an ability we have but which no human has. Use of it attracts far too much attention. If you keep on using it, one of these days you will start these humans thinking. And we don't want them to do that, yet."

"Yes, sir. But—"

"More questions?"

"Yes, sir. What—what happened to *your* mate, sir. There must have been two babies in *your* basket too."

Anger made a satanic mask of Jethro's face. "There was. A farmer found us, took us to raise. That farmer was named Wilkinson. He had a son, an older boy, as mean a little devil as ever lived. He hated us. He also raised hogs. The little girl who was to be my future mate was playing with her ball. He threw it into the pig pen. She ran through the fence after it."

His voice sank to a husky whisper. "The hogs killed her."

For a time he could not speak. Then his voice came again, weak and tired. "I think I went crazy when she died. At least I have almost no memories of that I even forgot his name. Later, the that time. I hated the boy so much farmer died and I was placed in an orphanage. Growing up, I forgot almost everything about my childhood. Later, when I met the farmer boy again, I didn't recognize him. When I began to puzzle out the truth about myself, I wondered what happened to the little girl who was to have been my mate. When I recognized Wilkinson, finally, I remembered what had happened. That's the last reason I had for killing him—I finally recognized him as the man who had grown out of the boy who had thrown Me'an's toy int the hog pen."

His vice went into husky silence. The shabby room was silent.

The boy and the girl had drawn close together. They stood looking down at him, pity on their faces.

THE END

Sinking Continents

By J. R. MARKS

THAT THE earth's temperature is slowly rising is an observational fact. As more and more data are accummulated the exact rate will be determined. And this temperature rise may have some rather chilling fantastic effects.

For one thing, the oceans are rising—at a very slow rate—but rising. Every three hundred years the seas thrust themselves up just one more foot! And where does this extra water come from?—it comes from the slowly melting Polar caps!

It has been estimated that if the ice which sheaths Greenland were to melt, there is such an enormous amount of it, that it would cause the oceans of the world to rise about one hundred and fifty feet! And this is only a small portion of all the ice that covers the Polar Regions. Such an event of course would occur slowly and only over many thousands of years time, but its effects would be all to the good. True some of our coast-lines would disappear, but on the other hand, vast areas of fertile ground beneath the ice-caps would be exposed to agriculture.

This warming up of the Arctic Regions is further shown by the fact that fish are breeding farther north, Alaskan forests are growing northwards and new land is beginning to appear. Come to the North Pole—it's a perfect summer resort!

"Robotization . . ."

By L. A. BURT

IT'S AN awkward word, "robotization", but there's nothing more descriptive than it, especially now that the most respectable of technical journals are beginning to use it frequently. Conservative trades magazines of industrial chemistry like the word—it fits a situation.

Science-fictionists need no explanation of course. The word implies automaticity and robotry. Immediately images of metal men come to mind. While in practice this isn't quite the case—the conventional robot-monster having not yet been designed as we like to picture him—the robot in industry is definitely here!

Robotization applies to the new method of trying to make industrial operations as automatic as they can be made. Every conceivable type of mechanical "brain" is employed. The result is nothing short of miraculous. This is particularly true in the chemical industry. Entire factories are run with skeleton crews of a dozen or so men, outside the administrative forces, men whose major function is to read dials and turn knobs! This is not imagination or guess. In oil refineries, chemical plants, gas-generating plants—and a thousand others—human hands hardly enter the picture. The electrical brains and the mechanical muscles have taken over. Industry had been robotized. "Robotization" is the watchword—and what a mouthful!



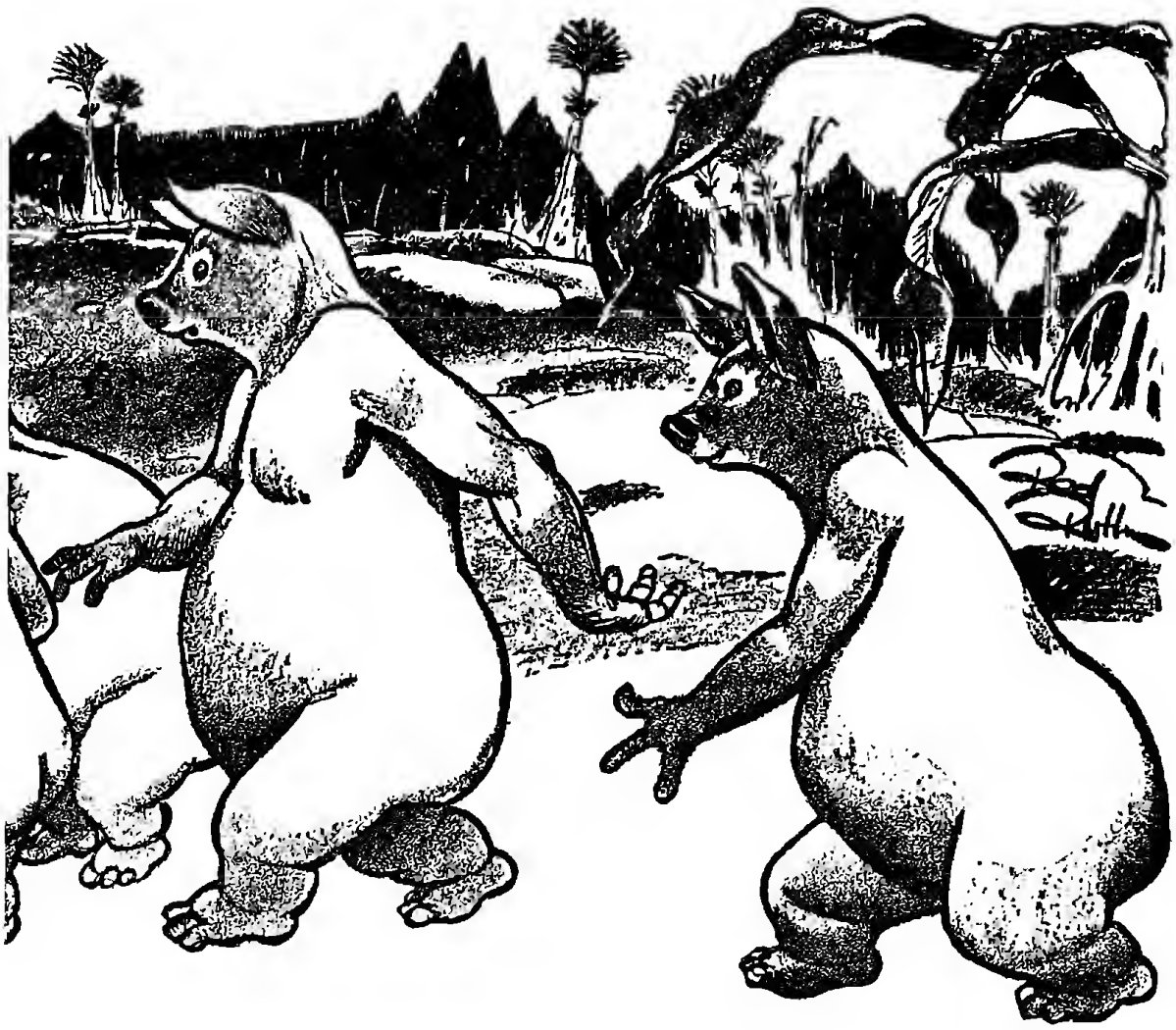
The little creatures gathered around the two humans, watching them with interest.

The ETERNAL EVE

By John Wyndham

With more men than women on Venus, Amanda had to decide whether to be loved or to be lucky!

THE MAN came clear of the trees, showing as a small light dot against the background of dark trunks. Amanda got the glasses on to him. His clothing was in a worse state than her own: the pants had picturesque rents, and there was not a lot left of the shirt. Something unorthodox had happened to his hair and beard, too. He could have got it that way if he had let it grow until it bothered him and then impatiently hacked off a bunch here and there with a knife. At his back he



carried a pack. A rifle hung by its sling from his left shoulder. When Amanda recognized him her lips pressed a little more closely together, and she reached for her own rifle.

A few yards out into the open he stopped, scanning the hillside before him. At his back the pale pennant trees streamed like weeds in a brook, tall feather-tops swung to the light breeze, the fronds of the tree-ferns rippled so that waves of motion seemed to wash across the whole plain. For a minute or two he stood quite still. His gaze passed over and beyond the spot where she lay, without a pause. Then he hitched his pack, and began to plod upwards.

Behind her tuft of scrubby bushes Amanda waited, watching him detachedly, dispassionately. Presently, with slow, careful movements, she pushed her rifle gently forward, and set the telescopic sights. Her right hand slid back to the small, her finger on to the trigger. Then she paused. She let him come on another hundred yards, making a little to her left, and then reset the sights...

When she fired, he stopped, looking round wildly. He had no cover to drop to. She fired again...

After he fell he did not move any more. She put down the rifle, and took up the glasses to make sure.

All day long he lay there, with the pale, grass-like growth beneath him reddened by his blood. Towards evening she went down the hillside, carrying a rope. With it she dragged him laboriously to the edge of the cliffs. There she carefully unfastened the rope before she pushed the body over.

Then she went back to the cave.

AMANDA LAY on a blanket in the cave mouth. She rested on her elbows, her face cupped in her hands. In front the ground sloped steeply down to the cliff-edge. Beyond, growing dark now, was the sea —a fearsome, mysterious sea on which no ship had ever sailed.

At home, in such a setting, there would have been grey and white gulls wheeling plaintively, but here on Venus the birds were dark, business-like creatures, with no graceful leisure in their flight. The sea, by daylight, was a pale green, and slightly milky so that one could not look down into the water. A great deal of life went on in it—more, it seemed, in these latitudes than on the land. Birds, diving to catch fish in it, were likely not to reappear. Far out, large, unidentifiable shapes would break the water and stay visible for a few minutes. Sometimes huge, squid-like creatures swam slowly past. Now and then a kind of starfish, twenty or thirty feet across and looking like red coral, would cruise close inshore, keeping just awash. Most characteristic of all were the weed banks which came up on the northern current like floating islands with a life of their own, carrying colonies of small birds that pecked and fished in their pools as they drifted. Sometimes too, great limbs or flukes would slap the water, sending up clouds of spray from battle below. It was alien—and hostile to the very fringe. You had only to lean over the edge of the cliffs to see its outposts—the great crabs that patrolled the narrow foreshore like tanks on sentry-go.

Amanda, looking out across the unhorizoned sea, saw nothing of it. Her lips moved as she thought aloud, for she had been a long time alone.

"No!" she said. "It was *not* wrong. I've a *right* to protect myself—a *right*... He had no right over me. No one else has rights over me. I'm my own... He need not have come—he would have been all right if he had left me alone...

"It wasn't wrong—it was horrible,

but it wasn't *wrong*... If another of them comes I shall do it again...and again...until they don't come any more...

"They shouldn't make me do it. They've no right... It's horrible... horrible...!"

The light faded behind the perpetual clouds, and the sea grew slowly darker. Stillness settled as the birds went to roost. Down in the forest the night would be beginning to hum with insects, but here there was none. There was only the gentle lap of the water—and from time to time a faint, brittle clashing. The great crabs down on the shore, where the body had gone, never seemed to sleep...

Amanda put her hands over her ears, but she could still seem to hear them restlessly clattering over the stones. She could picture them, too, stopping now and then to stand stock-still, their eyes alert and swivelling on their stalks, the enormous claws raised ready to seize anything that might fall from above...

She moved back into the cave, and lit a little clay lamp for company. Its tiny flame kept the darkness just at bay.

"It *wasn't* wrong..." she said, again. "He had no right... I'm a human being, not an animal... I want love and kindness—tenderness..."

She jumped to her feet and stood with her arms raised, both fists clenched, as though she hammered at something above her.

"Oh, God," cried Amanda. "Why me? Why me? Why out of all of them must it be *me*? I *won't* ... I *won't*... I refuse it. Do you hear? I *refuse*..."

She sank down again. Her lips trembled. The flame of the little lamp sparkled and then blurred as she let the tears come...

WHEN AMANDA VARK had first landed at the Melos settlement on Venus—and that was a time that now seemed infinitely further away than its measurement on the calendar—it had been in the expectation of an interesting, but uneventful assignment. In her concentration on the nature of the job itself, it had scarcely occurred to her that for eighteen months she would have to live as one of the residents of a pioneer settlement. But the fact that the place did have a life and mind of its own was made clear to them by the reserve with which the colony received them, The arrival of three men and two women who had nothing to do with prospecting, exploration or commerce, roused immediate suspicion. The fact that they introduced themselves as an anthropological expedition and were accredited as such, scarcely helped at all. For one thing, few of the residents had any idea what anthropology was, did, or might do, while those who believed that it somehow concerned the study of natives could only, in view of the non-existence of any human natives upon Venus, be disbelieved. The assumption, therefore, had quickly grown that they were some sort of inefficiently disguised government inquiry probably portending interference—and if there was one thing the colony felt solidly about, from the Administrator down to the visiting spacehand, it was interference.

Uncle Joe, as the eminent Dr. Thorer was known to his expedition's company, set himself patiently to disperse this cloud of misunderstanding. It was true, he agreed, that there were no human natives, but there were the griffas. From the scientific point of view these timid, silvery-furred little creatures were believed to be interesting. They were known to be intelligent and to live by some kind of

social system, and it was thought likely that but for man's arrival they would in time have risen to be the masters of Venus. The expectation was, therefore, that they would provide valuable material for the study of primitive sociology.

He made slow headway. The only colonial value placed on griffas resided in their silver pelts. It was not readily comprehensible that anyone should spend good money on an expedition just to find out how they lived. Nevertheless, as it became obvious that the party's did actually, if perplexingly, lie in these matters, suspicion began slowly to recede.

Gradually the men of the group came to be accepted, though still with reservation, but the position of the women was more difficult. The existence of two surnameless girls who had already established themselves in the colony did not make it any easier.

Maisie and Dorrie were a pair of those good-looking, well-built girls that inevitably turn up on frontiers. You could have found them with the forty-niners, or, at the right times, in Dawson City, Kimberley, or Coolgardie. It was Maisie's fancy to move with a feline languor in shiny, inappropriate, but indisputably popular frocks. Her genuine blonde hair she wore dressed to a masterly height. When she became vocal it was to thrum deeply rather than to speak, and to convey with it the impression of a Southern accent. Dorrie's line was vivacity. Her brown eyes gleamed in a lively face framed by dark curls. Her nose tilted up a little, and her mouth was red as a new wound. She chattered volubly, introducing, except in moments of stress, sounds that were vaguely continental.

The members of the colony knew where they were with them: with Alice Felson and Amanda Vark they did not, so they waited to see.

IN THE matter of Alice it was not necessary to wait very long. At the age of twenty-nine she had already acquired two distinct reputations—one of them scholarly. To her work and to matters which interested her she brought an acutely analytical mind; when she was not working, she rested it thoroughly. The brilliance which exacted respect in academic circles moved right into the back seat. What took over would have been remarkable even in an uninhibited, poorly balanced seventeen-year-old; it seemed to know of no control but the accelerator. She lost practically no time in surrounding herself with an array of incipient crises very wearing to the nerves of a closed community.

But Amanda had remained problematical. There was a rumor that she was engaged to be married to someone back home on Earth. It was not true, but when she heard it, she felt it to have its uses, and refrained from denying it, so that the slight aloofness remained.

A month after her arrival she still had scarcely spoken to either of the other two girls. She was aware of them, and watched them with a naive admiration for their self-confidence. They made her feel terribly inexperienced and mousey by contrast in her plain shirt and trousers. Nor, she could see, were they unconscious of Alice and herself. They watched, too, and they noted, but out of a fund of experience they made no approach.

Things settled down like that. Amanda had plenty of work on her hands. She was by far the youngest of the party, and, as such, the natural recipient of much of the donkey work. But she was interested. It had not been easy at first to make sympathetic

contact with the griffas. Their naturally shy disposition had been greatly increased by the frontier tendency to shoot first and think afterwards—if at all. It took patience, perseverance, and numerous bars of chocolate to offset that result. Nevertheless, it was done, and she enjoyed helping to do it. She found them amusing and lovable little creatures, and with an intelligence so avid that the task became eminently worth while. Thus the party settled down to an assignment which seemed likely to prove for her, whatever it might be for Alice, unexciting. A matter of eighteen months (in Earth reckoning) of conscientious observation and note-taking, then the return home. No dream, no presentiment ever suggested to her that a time would come when she would be still on Venus living alone in a cave which she called her home—because there was no other home to go to...

AMANDA'S better acquaintance with Maisie and Dorrie arose from an incident which revealed that the life of the colony, even outside Alice's aura, was not always placid.

Markham Renarty had been seeing her back to her hut after the customary evening's relaxation at the Clubhouse. Markham had his points—there was no need of defensive tactics with him as there was likely to be with David Brire who was the youngest male member of the party—or as there certainly would have been with other self-suggested escorts. Markham was a family man. He was, indeed, well launched on one of his interminable and pointless anecdotes about his singularly boring wife and family back home on Earth, when a piercing scream brought them up standing.

As they realized which hut it must have come from, they began to run. They set foot on the verandah just as the scream came again. The scene inside the hut required no explaining words. Dorrie, whose hut it was, stood pressed back against the further wall. Blood from a wound in her shoulder was trickling down one naked arm, and on the black satin bosom of her dress. Her visitor stood in the middle of the floor. He had a stained knife in his hand, and at the moment appeared to be trying to collect enough steadiness to approach her again. Amanda left him for Markham to deal with, and ran across to the girl. She was just in time to catch her as she folded up.

When Markham looked round from throwing out the drunk she was trying to staunch the wound with her handkerchief.

"Better get the doctor quickly. She's losing a lot," Amanda told him.

"The doc passed out cold an hour ago," he reminded her.

"Oh, God!" said Amanda. "Well, get the first-aid satchel from my hut, then—and hurry."

Dorrie opened her eyes.

"Is it bad?" she asked.

"It looks nastier and messier than it is. You'll be all right," Amanda told her, hoping that she sounded convincing. "Here, take a drink of this." And she held a cup to lips which now looked like a second gash. in the girl's white face.

"Pretty dim of me," Dorrie said. "Must be losing my touch. I can usually handle 'em okay." And she fainted again.

Markham came back with the first-aid case and began to fill a bowl with water.

"Do you know anything about this sort of job?" Amanda asked. "It's worse than I thought."

He shook his head. "Not a thing, I'm afraid."

Amanda compressed her lips, and

began to open the kit.

"Nor do I—but somebody's got to do something," she said, and set to work. "You'd better fetch her friend—if you can find her," she told him.

Maisie put in her appearance some ten minutes later. She said nothing, but sat down beside Amanda, watching, and handing things as necessary. When it was finished, they put Dorrie to bed.

Maisie looked at Amanda. She found a glass, and poured a stiff drink into it. Coming back, she put her arm round her.

"Good girl," she said. "Here, take a shot of this. You need it."

Amanda drank obediently. She choked a little on it—partly the strength of the spirit, but partly reaction.

"Sorry," she said. "I'm not the kind—I don't usually—" Then she burst soothingly into tears.

A look of gloomy purpose came into Maisie's eyes as her arm tightened round Amanda's shoulders.

"You just watch me blast the pants off that doc tomorrow," she said. "I'll get him so that he jitters at the sight of a bottle—even a coke."

FROM THE next day the colony had seemed to shift up and make room for Amanda. The two girls adopted an attitude towards her which varied between awe at her scholarship—which they appeared to regard as a cleverly developed though rather impractical form of higher guesswork—and a sense of responsibility towards her inexperience. Maisie particularly seemed to take this to heart. There were remarks which would make her frown.

"What troubles me, honey," she said once, "is your darned innocence. This ain't no location for it. Maybe you do genuinely forget that you're one quarter of the female population here—but others don't. In a dump like this you gotta watch your step. Honest you have, all of the time. We *know*, don't we, Dorrie?"

"Sure," agreed Dorrie. "Kinda like juggling. You know those guys that keep a dozen balls in the air at once while they ride a bicycle on a wire? Well, that's it."

"I don't see—" Amanda began.

"That's just what's bitin' me. You don't see—but you will," Maisie told her. "Trouble is you've spent your life learning things, and there's a hell of a lot of difference between the things you learn and the things you just kinda get to know. But when you do see trouble beginning to come your way from some of the big irresistibles around here, then let us know. We can handle 'em."

Dorrie backed that up. With a confidence quite unimpaired by her recent lapse of skill, she added:

"Sure. You just tell us. We can fix 'em."

Amanda did not see a great deal of them, for their lives were busiest at times when hers was not, but she was glad to have earned their good will. It was a comforting thought, even if there appeared to be no likelihood of her having to call on them for aid. It needed the coming of the unbelievable disaster to draw them closer together for mutual support.

IN WHATEVER way the first news of the disaster had reached the Melos colony their faith in all they knew would have stopped them from believing it for a time. Some never did believe: a few minds refused to take it, and pitifully broke down. In the event, the news came in installments, building up to the incredible climax.

When first the radio men could raise no reply from Earth, it was simply inconvenient, and they were blamed for poor maintenance of their gear.

When the apparatus was found to be okay, the trouble was attributed to a radiation blanket which would pass in a while. When contact was made with the ship *Celestes* and her operator admitted that he too was unable to raise any of the Earth stations, it began to look more serious. But it was not until the *Astarte* which had put out from Venus a couple of weeks before reported that she would attempt to put about and return if possible—for lack of anywhere else to go—that it began to be unbelievable.

From that moment nobody talked of anything else—but they still did not really believe it. Even after the incoming *Diana* had grounded and her crew had told their story, one still hoped at heart that there had been some mistake, and a crowd still besieged the radio hut while, inside, the operators went on frenziedly trying to make contact with the Lunar Station, with the Port Gillington settlement on Mars, with ships in space, with anywhere that might answer with solid, reassuring news.

According to those on the *Diana* it had happened that there was a telescope turned back to Earth so that several of them had been able to watch the whole thing on the screen. One moment the Earth had been hanging in space, looking, as always, like a pearl with a cool, cloudy green shimmer; the next it resembled an over-ripe fruit that had split its skin, and the juice that burst from it was flame that stabbed thousands of miles into the darkness. There had been a few dazzling, awesome moments, and then it had begun to break into pieces. So rapid had been the disintegration that half an hour later the telescopes were unable to find more than a few measureable fragments. The *Diana's* crew could tell no more than that...

Everyone's recollection of the next few days was hazy. Most of them were dazed and absent-minded. Some cursed steadily; others fell hopefully to praying for the first time in their lives. The majority chose the shortest road to illusion via the bar where they drank themselves comfortably stupid or into baseless but passionate arguments as to whether the disaster had been a natural phenomenon, a new weapon of war that had overreached itself, or the product of some atomic carelessness. To the rest, the actual cause seemed a matter of utterly unprofitable speculation. Whatever it had been, it could not possibly help anyone to know any more about it now....

A few more ships came in. Some corroborated the *Diana's* report. Others, looking out for a routine check of bearings, had found that where the Earth should have been there was nothing. The only additional information was that the moon was heading away into space and the planetary orbits were re-balancing themselves...

On the night after the *Diana* grounded, Amanda had gone out alone, still numbly incredulous. Looking up at the clouds eternally covering the Venusian sky she kept on telling herself that it could not be true. Whatever they were saying, the Earth must be somewhere up there still. Such a colossal catastrophe *could not* really happen....

Even later, when the other ships had added their evidence and she had to accept it, there was still a whisper somewhere which kept on saying: "It can't be real. A thing like that just *couldn't* happen. One day I'll wake up and find it's all there really—with things going on just as they always have."

It was a whisper which grew fainter and fainter, but it would never quite die away....

THE ADMINISTRATOR made some attempt to puli things together, but not with success. His authority had been behind him, not in him, and now he lacked weight. His efforts did little but set malcontents recalling earlier grudges, but he persisted.

Amanda spent hours of these unreal days in the company of Maisie and Dorrie, consuming endless cups of coffee and innumerable cigarettes. For some reason—possibly because there had never been any stable background to their lives—they seemed less effected than the rest, and their companionship steadied her. As Maisie said:

"It's the guys with the biggest plans that get knocked silliest. Dorrie and me have always gambled anyway; so what? While you're still breathin' life's gotta go on—they'll get round to that in a while."

Most other people Amanda avoided. She did not flock to the landing field with the rest when the few ships that had managed to make successful diversions came in to their final groundings. She was not even there when the last of all, the *U.S.S. Annabelle Lee,* made sanctuary on her last few pounds of fuel, bringing, among her crew, a young man named Michael Parbert...

ON THE afternoon of the day that somebody knifed the Administrator Maisie drifted into Amanda's hut. Amanda was working on some papers, but she pushed them aside and threw over a cigarette.

"What's the idea?" Maisie asked, as she lighted it. "That kind of stuff's no use to nobody no more."

"Uncle Joe's idea," Amanda explained. "He says that for all we know we're the only ones left anywhere, so it's up to us to make a record of all we know between us. Sort of encyclopaedia."

"Uh-huh. And who for?" Maisie wanted to know.

"Well, there *may* be others—and failing everything else he says that the griffas will be up to learning it one day. We've come a long way in five thousand years or so, he says, but we're only at the beginning really, so we ought to save what we can to help them along."

"Ought we?" said Maisie. "Looking at the funny way we've come, I'd say give the griffas or anything else a clean start—but then, I wouldn't know."

"Nor me," admitted Amanda, "—but it makes something to do." She changed the subject. "Who did it—the Administrator, I mean?"

Maisie inhaled, and blew the smoke out. She shook her head.

"I wouldn't know that, either. I might make a near guess, but what the hell? —If it wasn't one, it'd have been another. He had it coming, anyway. The thing is, it kinda writes off the old setup."

She sent another cloud of blue smoke thoughtfully across the room.

"Meaning—?" inquired Amanda.

Maisie leaned forward, and regarded her.

"Honey, I got a feeling things are going to break open around here. In a dump like this you gotta have a boss of some kind. A stuffed one was okay—with a government in back of him—but when the government's gone, and some guy's let out the rest of the stuffing—well, then you just naturally find some other guys getting big ideas. And the climate's likely to get kinda lively while they're deciding whose idea is the biggest."

"How lively?" Amanda asked.

Maisie shook her head.

"I'd like to know that, too. What isn't funny is having a lot of dopes around that are just about crazy on account of what's happened back

home. I know the poor devils can't help it—but that don't make it any healthier."

"I see," said Amanda.

Maisie looked doubtful.

"Maybe you do see: maybe you don't—quite. Trouble with educated gals is they keep seeing in one pocket, and understanding in another." She paused. Then she added: "You had a boy back home? One that you were set to marry, I mean—not just the kind a gal's gotta have for self-respect?"

Amanda hesitated.

"There *was* one..." she said, slowly. "But he didn't... Well, he was the only one I ever wanted—and when he chose somebody else, I wasn't interested in those things any more. So I got this job and came here."

THERE WAS a pause. Maisie said:

"It ain't natural, honey. You're a swell kid, you're young, you're pretty, you got it all."

"It's natural to me," said Amanda.

"In my experience," observed Maisie, "every gal is a one-man woman just so long—or so short."

"Except Alice?" suggested Amanda, attempting to deflect the conversation.

"*Not* excepting Alice. She's the so short part. Kinda concentrated while it lasts." Maisie ruminated a moment, and then reverted. "Well, I reckoned it'd be better for you to be expecting trouble when it comes. And when it does come, honey, take it from me the best thing is to—"

Amanda listened, impressed, to a sound, if unconventional, lecture in applied physiology. Her thanks at the end of it were as sincere as Maisie's intention. She had a grateful feeling in the sense of a friend at hand.

Nevertheless, the next few days passed with less overt trouble than Maisie had led one to expect. No rival would-be leaders stood up to shoot it out, nor did any gang thrust an unsuitable chief into authority. The sensation of going to pieces continued quietly with an air of all round loosening up which it was no one's appointed business to check. Almost a whole week more passed before Amanda had her first personal encounter with trouble. It was when the latch of her hut door rattled one evening just as she was on the point of going to bed that it came.

"Who's there?" she called.

A thick voice that she could not place answered unintelligibly.

"Go away," she said. "This is the wrong hut."

But the man did not go away. She heard his feet shuffle, then something thudded against the door so that it bulged. There was a second thud, and it flew open as the bolt socket tore out. The man who stood in the door way was tall, burly, red-headed, and unsteady. She recognized him as one of the maintenance-shop crew.

"Get out of here, Badger," she said, firmly.

He swayed, and steadied himself by the doorpost.

"Now, now, 'Manda. 'S'not the way to speak to a visitor."

"Go on, Badger. Beat it," said Amanda.

" 'S'not ladylike—'beat it'!" Badger reproved. He groped behind him for the door, and shut it. "Listen, 'Manda. You're a nishe girl, you unnerstan' things. I got nothing now, all gone, nothing to live for any more. I wanna lose m'self."

"You'll have to go lose yourself some place else," Amanda told him, unfeelingly. "Get along now."

He stood approximately still, looking at her. Then his eyes narrowed,

and there was a displeasing grin on his lips.

"No, b'God! Why sh'd I go? C'm here."

Amanda did not move. She faced him steadily.

"Get out!" she said, again.

His grin widened.

"So you don't wanna play. Scared of me, huh." He began to advance, slowly and not very straightly.

Amanda was rather surprised to find herself very little scared of him. She stood her ground, carefully calculating the distance. When he was near enough, she let fly with all her strength, using her foot.

It was an unexpected, and, in Badger's view, highly dastardly form of attack. It was also successful. For the first time since his entrance she felt it safe to turn her back while she got her pistol. Then, to the groaning figure doubled up on the floor she said:

"Now will you get out! Go on!"

The answer was a moaned string of curses.

Amanda pressed the trigger and sent a bullet through the floorboards close beside his head.

"Go on. Beat it, quick," she repeated.

The sound of the shot sent a gleam of sense through Badger's befuddled discomfort. He dragged himself up and hobbled to the door. He paused with his hand on the post, as if considering some Parthian line, but the sight of the pistol discouraged it. He turned away into the darkness, and his picturesque mutterings faded out, to leave Amanda contemplating her own efficiency in the matter with some awe.

IT SEEMED as if that had been the sign for more things to move. The very next day Alice's present, a husky young engineer, was neatly drilled through the head by, presumably, one of her pasts. It was a privation which rendered her almost inconsolable for two whole days. A night or two later an enterprising spaceman was shot while looting the general storehouse by somebody else with the same idea. The following evening a ridiculous but bloody knife fight broke out in the saloon over a sentimental record agreeable to some but intolerably nostalgic to others. A couple of nights after that, Amanda, kept awake by an unusually turbulent fracas, or maybe party, in Dorrie's hut, saw the silhouette of a man at work upon her window. She gave no warning, but reached under the pillow for the pistol. She did not know whether either of her shots hit the arm she aimed at, but, anyway, he left. Hurriedly. The following evening a ridiculous ham to put some bars across the windows. That evening a shot whizzed close to his head as he returned from seeing her home. The next morning she went to see Maisie about it.

"Okay. I'll get my grapevine humming," Maisie promised.

Three hours later she came around to Amanda's hut.

"It's that red-headed dope, Badger," she said. "You've got him kind of sore at you, honey. He's been telling his buddies you're gonna be his girl. The idea seems to be that if he scares everyone else off, you'll just take kindly to him sooner or later, out of lonesomeness."

"Oh, is it?" said Amanda. "Well, what do I do about that?"

Maisie considered.

"That Badger's one-tracked—and just kinda naturally stupid. Trouble is he's got quite a pull over that gang of his—so I guess they must be a grade more stupid. If I was you I'd let it ride awhile till things settle

down. It could be it'll just work off."

And Amanda, with no better suggestion of her own, agreed reluctantly.

It was about that time that she began to be aware that Michael Parbert, of the *Annabelle Lee*, seemed to be a member of every group she sat with in the Clubhouse. Sedulously she took no more notice of him than of any of the others. It was impossible not to know that he was a personable young man—but so were a number of others. She began to understand Dorrie's words on juggling and tightwires. There was a feeling that everyone was just waiting for her to fumble or slip. It needed immense concentration to show no suggestion of partiality. It even drove her to staying away from the Clubhouse some evenings, to ease the strain by sitting in her hut in resentful solitude.

SOME THREE uneasy weeks later Maisie came around to Amanda's hut again.

"Big fight last night," she observed, as she lit her cigarette.

"Oh," said Amanda. She was not greatly interested. There seemed to be fights big or small most nights lately.

"Yeh. That Badger got beaten up," Maisie added.

Amanda looked up from the shirt she was mending.

"Badger! Who was it?"

"Michael. He had Badger out cold at the end, they tell me." She paused. Amanda said nothing. She went on: "You wouldn't want to know what it was all about?"

"No," said Amanda.

Maisie flicked her ash thoughtfully on to the floor.

"Listen, honey. You gotta face it. What're you gonna do?"

It was no good pretending not to understand Maisie Amanda had learned that. She said:

"Nothing. Why should I?"

Maisie shook her head.

"You gotta do something."

"I don't see why."

"Now, don't act dumb with me, honey. You gotta pick yourself a boy-friend."

Maisie looked at her.

"Say, who do you think you are? There's all these guys lined up—all the men that are left now—all you gotta do is point at one an' say 'I'll have that dope there', an' he'll come runnin'. Sakes alive, what more do you want? It's all on a dish—and you don't even have to find a local Reno if he pans out bad."

"No," said Amanda. "I told you I only ever wanted one guy—I mean, man."

"But listen. Things are all different. From now on you gotta *live* here—we all have. That's not the same as just stayin' awhile—an' it's no good foolin' yourself that it is. You gotta quit playing the old act before it flops hard. You can't go on being the little mascot any more. An' if you keep on trying it, you'll be causing more trouble around here than that Alice. Maybe it's nice for you to sit there like a pretty little honey-pot with the lid tight on—I wouldn't know; I never been that way—but it's just hell and temptation for a lot of these guys. An' you can't blame 'em for that; it's human nature."

"*Human* nature?" said Amanda, scornfully.

"Sure. What else? You gotta make up your mind. You gotta team up, so's they can see the way things are. Just so long as you keep dangling around like a forbidden fruit we ain't goin' to have no kind of peace in this dump—an' that's a fact. Now what about this Michael, honey?"

"No," said Amanda.

"Why not? I say he's a good guy. I

oughta know; I seen plenty of the other kind. An' anyone who can lay out that Badger has got what it takes."

"No," said Amanda.

"Now, listen, honey—"

"No, no, no!" said Amanda, violently. "*No!* Do you hear? I won't be the purse in a sluggers' prize fight. And I'm certainly not going to run to the big strong victor for protection. It's disgusting to be fought over as if I were a—a—a she-buffalo, or something. No!"

But Maisie was patient and persistent.

"Things are getting kinda primitive here," she said. "You ought to know the sort of thing that means, seein' it's your own subject. In a set-up that's goin' that way a girl's got two lines open: either she plays 'em along, the way Dorrie an' I do—an' I reckon you just ain't got the temperament—or she takes up with a guy who can put the fear of God into the rest of 'em. You think it over, honey, an' you'll see. You can get yourself a good guy to look after you, an' have cute babies, an' all that... It could be swell..."

"If you're so fond of babies—" Amanda began, and then stopped suddenly. "I'm sorry, Maisie."

"That's all right, 'Manda, dear. That's the way life is, an' I gotta take it... But *you* haven't, honey-lamb. So just think it over..."

"No!" said Amanda, and shook her head.

Nevertheless, she did spend a considerable part of her time thinking it over. There was no dodging it any more. She became increasingly aware of the tension around her as she sat in the Clubhouse, the way the men looked at her—and at one another. There were more fights; sometimes between surprisingly unexpected persons. She grew nervous and self-conscious, unable to speak naturally to any of them for fear of what a careless word might provoke.

Even Uncle Joe felt himself moved to give her advice—and though its form was more classical, it was too much the same effect as Maisie's.

The feeling of pressure building up made Amanda restless and edgy, but it also increased her obstinacy.

"No!" she repeated to herself. "I *won't*... I won't be driven at one of them. I'm me; my own self. They shan't make me *belong* to one of them. Never...never... Damn them, all of them..."

BUT RESISTANCE did not diminish the pressure. The climax came when she wakened to hear a shot just outside her hut. Exactly what happened she never found out. To her ears it sounded like a private fight which the intervention of other parties turned into a brisk skirmish. In the course of it at least two bullets slammed in through the hut's wooden wall, and out the other side. Amanda stayed in bed, having her mind made up for her. When the sounds of battle died away, she had reached her decision.

The next day she managed to slip off unnoticed into the forest to make contact with the griffas. The little creatures welcomed her. Since the disaster they had been neglected, for the classes to which they had come so eagerly, both for instruction and candy, had been discontinued.

It was difficult to know how much they grasped of the situation, but they seemed clear enough on two essentials—secrecy, and willingness to act as porters for payment in chocolate. They were able to come and go without causing comment, and for a week they did so, carrying away into the forest parcels suitable to their size.

On the final day Maisie came in again. She put up all the old arguments, and ended:

"Honey, I know this isn't your kind of life. They way I see you is in an old cottage somewhere in your England—a place with a garden, an' you in a print frock, an' a big hat, an' so on— But, hell, kid, it just ain't there any more. You gotta face it..."

"No!" said Amanda.

It had been hard not to say goodbye to Maisie, but she resisted the temptation. There were tears in her eyes as she watched the tall figure in its ridiculous shiny dress sway lazily away.

In the evening she wrote a note for Maisie. Then she strapped up her pack, fixed the holster on her belt, and put the rifle to hand. After she had turned out the light, she sat waiting, watching the uncurtained window.

The fuse took longer than she had calculated. Then, just as she was deciding that something must have gone wrong there came a felty thump, and in a few seconds flames burst from the windows of an empty hut a hundred and fifty yards away. There were shouts and sounds of running feet, against the flames she could see dark figures dodging excitedly about. When she was satisfied that the blaze had attracted the attention of all who chanced not to be paraiytically drunk she opened her door and slipped quietly away through the darkness towards the forest.

THE THING that saved both Amanda's resolution and her reason was that the griffas did not abandon her during her months in the cave. Even when all the chocolate was gone their insatiable curiosity still brought them up from the forest to examine, observe, and ask endless questions until she found herself holding classes again. Long ago she had ceased to use even the little she had been able to learn of their language, and now they, too, seemed to be in the process of dropping it. Frequently she would hear them talking between themselves in their odd, fluty form of English—the more curious for its being learned from the *Works of William Shakespeare* and the *Oxford Book of English Verse,* which were Amanda's only books.

Nor was it a one-sided arrangement. By way of payment they kept her supplied with fruits, vegetables and edible roots, teaching her to live off the land in a way that she could never have taught herself.

Nearly six months passed before she had any news of the settlement, then one of the griffas surprised her by producing a packet of paper tied round with a string. She opened it to find a number of sheets written in a large, unpractised hand, with the signature 'Maisie' at the end.

From them she learned that the colony, after passing through a crisis, had now become more orderly. At the worst time Badger had acquired a following which threatened to dominate the whole place unless it were suppressed. Accordingly, it had been suppressed, and Uncle Joe had been elected president, chief, or whatever you liked to call it. After that Badger had disappeared. The radio operator had picked up distorted sounds on the Mars wavelength to show that somebody there was alive still, at least. Alice had disappeared, and alone. This was so improbable, that everyone feared the worst. She had been moody for a couple of days, and then vanished. No one had seen her go, she seemed to have taken nothing with her, and after two months there was still no sign of her. Dorrie had been dangerously ill, but was now

almost recovered. She was bitterly disappointed, though; apparently she had always wanted a baby, though nobody had guessed it, and now there was no more chance of it. Finally, what about Amanda coming back?

The implication was not lost on Amanda. She was now the very last hope. It was another bit of pressure to nag at her.

"No!" said Amanda. "I won't—I *won't*. They can't force me."

She wrote a brief reply on the back of one of the sheets, used the rest for lighting her fire, and decided to forget it.

FOR A DAY before he arrived Amanda had known from the griffas that there was a man coming her way. It did not greatly surprise her. Sooner or later someone would be bound to find out where she was. She had not known that it was Badger until she saw him through the glasses. Nor did she know how he had found her. She suspected that he must have caught and tortured a griffa till it told him. If so, he had got what he deserved. He'd torture no more griffas now.

After a day or two the shooting worried her less. If a soldier could claim a clear conscience in defending his country and his womenfolk, how could hers be the worse for defending herself?

Her life went on as before, for if one thing was certain, it was that Badger would not have passed on the details of his ill-gotten bit of information.

Yet, a few weeks later, the griffas brought her the news of another man working that way.

Once more she took her rifle and concealed herself in the same spot. As before she watched a distant figure come out of the trees. Through the glasses she saw that it was Michael Parbert—the 'good guy' that Maisie had wanted her to choose. She lowered the glasses, with a frown. The situation would have been easier had it been one of Badger's gang. She hesitated a moment, and then called to one of the griffas. A few minutes later she watched the little creature make a detour and then go scuttling down the hillside. As it got nearer to the man it raised its arms, and she knew that it was calling to him. Through the glasses, she watched them meet. She could see it giving him her warning, and telling him to go back, but he made no move to do so. For a moment he appeared to dispute. The griffa reached up and took hold of his pants, dragging back the way he had come. He did not move, but stood looking up the hill. Then he shook the griffa off with an impatient movement, and started to climb.

Amanda's frown returned.

"Very well, then," she said grimly. And she reached for her rifle...

Later on, she slung the coil of rope over her shoulder, and set off down the slope with a purposeful step. What she had done before, she was prepared to do again. But when she got there he was not dead. He lay on the pale, matted grassy stuff, with the blood slowly oozing and caking round his two wounds. He was lightheaded, and crying like a child. She had never seen a man cry before. Her heart turned over, and she went down on her knees beside him.

"Oh, God," said Amanda, with tears in her own eyes. "What have I done...? What have I done...?"

FOR SEVERAL days it remained anybody's guess what Amanda had done, but then, though he was

very weak, he began unmistakably to get better.

Amanda, with a dozen or so griffas assisting, had carried him up to the cave. She had made him the most comfortable bed she could contrive with a mattress of springy twigs. And there he lay, delirious at first, then resting most of the time with his eyes shut. He made no complaints when she moved him to dress his wounds, and at first he was too exhausted to talk much. Occasionally she would see that his eyes were open, and that he had been watching her as she moved about the cave. Once he asked:

"Somebody shot me?"

"Yes," Amanda told him.

"Was it you?"

"Yes," she said, again.

"You're a bad shot. Why didn't you leave me there?"

"I don't know."

"Going to shoot me again when you've patched me up?"

"Go to sleep now, and stop asking silly questions," Amanda told him.

"I've got a letter for you. It's in my jacket—right hand pocket."

She found it, and pulled it out. It was queer to see an envelope again, and with 'Miss Amanda Vark' neatly written on it.

"Uncle Joe?" she asked.

He nodded. She tore it open. There were several sheets, and they started somewhat heavily. Dr. Thorer was prone to be a little pompous on paper:

My Dear Amanda,

This letter will not be easy for me to write, nor, perhaps, for you to read, yet I beg you to read it carefully and to consider its contents with the honesty which you would give to any social problem in your work...

Amanda read steadily on, with an expression which revealed nothing of her feelings to Michael as he watched her. When she had finished it, she went to the cave mouth. She sat there for some minutes, unmoving, and gazing out across the sea. Then she picked up the letter, and read the last few lines again:

...It may be that elsewhere in the system some of us will survive, but we do not know *that, nor are we likely ever to know. What we do know is that* here *it is* you, *my dear, who hold the keys of life and death. Why it should be to you that this wonderful and terrible thing has happened we shall also never know. But there is the chance that you might have daughters... You, and you alone, are* vas vitae, *the vessel of our life. Are you content that this shall be the end of it all? Can you carry such a burden on your mind? For you, Amanda, here, at least, are—Eve.*

When she looked up she saw that Michael was still watching her.

"Do you know what this is?" she asked.

He nodded. "You did, too, even before you opened it," he said.

Amanda turned and looked over the sea again. Her fists were clenched.

"Why me...? Why me...? Am I an animal—a brood mare? I won't, I tell you! My life is *mine*—it doesn't belong to any of you. I *won't*...!"

She crumpled up the letter and threw it into the small fire before the cave. It curled, singed, and then caught.

"See! You can tell him. You can tell all of them when you go back."

And she ran away out of the cave.

CONVALESCENCE was slow. To begin with he tired quickly. In

the evening the feebleness of the clay lamps left them with nothing to do but talk. He could, she found, do plenty of that, and she herself had some months of arrears to make up. Their conversations rambled in every direction, skirting only the present situation—though it was not always easy to do that. It was difficult when they spoke of laughter, crowds, children, not to stop short suddenly, remembering that these things would never be again...

But it was natural that most of the talk should be retrospective, and it could often be so without being altogether saddening. Talking of places made them live again—for a time. Amanda found herself growing familiar with Massachusetts Avenue, and the Common, with Brattle Street, and the Halls and elms of Harvard. She had all the best shops in Boston marked down, and could have found her way to Aunt Mary's house in Back Bay, if necessary. In return she toured him around the colleges of Oxford, took him for a summer evening in a punt on the river, and showed him the sunrise from Magdalen College tower....

The griffas continued to come for lessons, and as Michael grew stronger he, too, became a teacher. He made types of simple tools for them to copy; he showed them how to fish with both net and rod; made them a potter's wheel, and a simple loom. It amused Amanda to look across and see him working with a serious expression, while the little creatures clustered about him no less intently, rather like—children. She knew that he was enjoying it, and for some reason it pleased her to see that he got on better with them than had the less practical men of her own party...

When he first began to get about again she had formed the habit of keeping her pistol handy at night. It occurred to her that he had not once treated her as he might not have treated a younger brother, nor did he show the least sign of changing that attitude. In fact it would have seemed more normal if... But, anyway, you never could tell. She did not know that he had noticed the pistol until one night she turned round from tucking it into its place, and saw him looking at her. He was smiling. It was not an attractive kind of smile, because it turned the corners of his mouth down instead of up. He shook his head.

"You needn't bother with that thing. You're perfectly safe, you know. I'm kind of particular—allergic, you might say, to girls that shoot at me from cover. Sort of funny that way: just naturally got no interest in homicides, I guess."

"Oh," said Amanda, flatly. It didn't seem the kind of thing you could follow up.

ON A DAY which had begun like any other day he laid aside his breakfast bowl, and told her without warning:

"I'm okay now, near enough, so I'll be moving along."

Something hurt suddenly, and quite unexpectedly in Amanda's chest.

"You—you don't mean you're going?" she said.

"Yes. I can make it now—easy stages."

"But not today?"

"Looks a perfectly good day to me."

"But—"

"But what?"

"I—I don't know... Are you sure you're well enough yet?"

"Near ninety per cent, anyway. If I get stuck, one of the griffas can

fetch someone to pick me up."

"Yes, only—well, it's so unexpected, that's all."

"Why? What *did* you expect?"

Amanda looked at him confusedly. She had been to some trouble to prevent herself forming definite expectations of any kind.

"I—I don't know... I suppose it's goodbye, then?"

"That's it. Goodbye—and thank you for changing your mind."

"Changing—? But if you know I've—" she began. Then she stopped. "What do you mean?" she asked awkwardly.

"About killing me. What else?"

"Oh," said Amanda. "Oh, that."

As if in a dream she watched him put on his pack, still with the hole where one of her bullets had torn it. Her knuckles were white. As he picked up his rifle she made an uncertain movement, and then checked it.

"Goodbye," he said again.

"Goodbye," said Amanda, and damned her voice for sounding queer.

He went out of the cave. Half a minute later she followed round the shoulder of the hill to a point where she could watch him go. A party of griffas emerged from the trees to join him, and he strode on into the forest amongst them. He did not give one backward glance...

The whole landscape blurred before Amanda's eyes.

AFTER HE had gone, the cave should have reverted to what it was before he came. Logically, when one had got rid of the loom and all the other innovations by parking them in a smaller cave nearby, one was back to normal—only there was evidently something wrong with logic. Things did not automatically return to their former placid order. Amanda found herself restless. Conversation with none but the griffas irked her. She grew short-tempered with them, to their dismay and bewilderment, and then was contrite over her burst of impatience—only to find herself behaving in the same way again five minutes later.

More than ever was she aware of the alienness of the things about her. When one was alone they seemed to press more closely. She became aware of that loneliness and the quiet as she had never been before. The days lacked purpose. She seemed incapable of getting back into the old routine by day, and by night the cave was too quiet. If she woke in the darkness she missed the reassuring sound of his slow, steady breathing. Instead, the only thing to be heard was the distant scrape and stir of the crabs down on the shore....

For the first time she began to have misgivings about her own strength. It was no longer simple to be detached. In her more honest moments she knew that something was happening to her resolution—but it was happening too late. Some weeks ago she could have heeded Uncle Joe's letter. She could have returned to the settlement and made her choice, with her pride saved by his appeal. But now—how could she go back now? After he had walked away from her—without once looking back....

She swayed between moods of loneliness and determination, misery, and bitter resolve. Yet she knew that the resolve was weakening. She would never again have the confidence which had coldly trained her rifle on the approaching Badger. She wondered what steps she would take when the griffas next warned her of someone's approach...and then left it to be decided at the time.

IN THE event, it was a decision she did not have to make, for there was no warning. Early on a day about a month after Michael had left she heard the griffas arriving as usual for their lesson, but among the pattering of their feet she detected another step. She pulled the pistol from her belt, and pointed it at the entrance. A figure, huge among its little escort, came to a stop in the cave mouth. Amanda's heart leaped once, and then sank. Against the light she could not see who it was; but she knew who it was not... The figure stood still a moment, then it said slowly, on a reproving note:

"Would you mind putting that thing down, honeylamb. It looks kinda nervous to me."

Amanda lowered the pistol, and stared at Maisie as she came in. Something seemed to give way and pour up inside her. She ran forward and clung. Maisie put up both arms and held her.

"There, there, Honey," she soothed her. It was all either of them said for quite a little time.

"How did you get here?" Amanda asked.

She had recovered, and hospitably brought out baskets of sweet shoots, and flat-cakes made from root flour.

"It wasn't so much the getting, as the getting to get," Maisie explained. "I'd have been here long before, but if there is one thing that those griffas have a thorough hold on, it's the meaning of the word 'secret'. I've been trying for months to persuade or bribe 'em. But it's kinda difficult with griffas, you know: now, if it had been men— Anyway, here I am—and three days of steady going it's taken me."

Amanda regarded her with admiring gratitude. Forest travel was not an activity one associated with Maisie, any more than one associated her with the practical suit she now wore. She said:

"Why have you come, Maisie?"

"Well, honey, I wanted to see you. An', for another thing, I reckoned that anyone else who came would likely get shot. It's said to be sort of rough in these parts."

"Then—then he did get back all right?"

"Yeh," said Maisie. She did not amplify, but began a hunt in the pockets of her jacket and trousers. "I got a message for you some place."

"Yes..?" Amanda leaned forward, eagerly.

"Sure. Now where the hell would I have put it? This ain't my kind of outfit, you know," she complained. "Oh, here it is." She smoothed out the envelope. "From Uncle Joe," she added, handing it over.

"Oh..." said Amanda, flatly.

She took it. She opened it with reluctance, for she was sure what it would say. She was perfectly right.

"No!" she said, again, crumpling it up. "No!" But the negative lacked something of its old force—and there was another quality about it, too.

"That's all?" she asked.

"What else would there be?"

"I wondered... I don't know.. "

Suddenly Amanda was crying.

Maisie took her hand.

"Now, honey, you don't want to get that way. You've been too long alone here. Snap out of it now, and come along back with me."

"But—but I can't—not now," sobbed Amanda. "He doesn't want me. He—he never looked back, not once. He s-said he h-hated girls that shoot from cover."

"Nonsense," Maisie told her, briskly. "Every smart girl always shoots from cover. So you've fallen for this guy, have you?"

"Y-yes," wept Amanda.

"Huh," said Maisie, "then I reckon that fixes it."

She got up and went to the entrance.

A minute later another step outside the cave made Amanda look up suddenly.

"It's—it's—Oh, Maisie, you've been cheating!"

"Me, honey? Never on your life. It's just what they call a forcing bid, maybe," Maisie said, and she drifted out of the cave as Michael walked in.

AN HOUR later she returned, with a heavy footfall.

"Long enough, you two," she said. "I got the whoozies watching those darned crabs down there. Good place to be checking out of."

Amanda, sitting close beside Michael, looked up.

"Not yet," she said, "we're going to have a—a kind of honeymoon first."

"Huh. Well, every gal to her taste—but I'd lay off any idea of beach parties around here. If you mean it, I'll be getting along—and I'll see about fixing a hut ready for you. *And* I'll tell Uncle Joe you've decided to take his advice—he'll be kinda tickled."

"No!" said Amanda, with all her old decision. "I'm *not* taking his advice. *This* hasn't got anything at all to do with duty to community, or to posterity, or to history, or to moral obligations, or the racial urge to survive—or with anything but *me*. I'm doing it because I *want* to do it."

"Uh-huh," said Maisie, peaceably. "Well, it's your affair, so you should know, honey. Still, it wouldn't surprise me one little bit to hear that the other Eve once said just that selfsame thing..."

THE END

SEA TO AIR—FIRE!

By JOHN WESTON

THE MOBILITY, the power and the promise of the rocket have recently been confirmed in a report issued by correspondents aboard the one American guided-missile ship, the U.S.S. *Norton*. For, from the deck of the ship, a *Viking* type rocket was hurled one hundred and six miles into the air in what is believed to be the first successful ship-rocket launching performance.

The German V-2, launched at White Sands, New Mexico reached a maximum altitude of one hundred and fourteen miles. This tremendous height was almost reached by the American-built single stage rocket, the Viking fired from the *Norton*. A comparison indicates that American rocket technique is passing from the student stage into a mastery of itself.

The Viking rocket is a slim needle, smaller and more efficient than the huge V-2. Its powerful engines developed such terrific thrust that at the peak of its velocity, it was travelling thirty-six hundred miles an hour—one mile a second!

But what makes this event the more remarkable is the amazing fact that the entire operation of launching and firing was done from the deck of a moving ship! The suggestion in this fact of course, is obvious. It means that we can put a rocket almost anywhere on Earth we choose. The ship makes the delivery—the rocket motors then take over! Essentially the test aboard the *Norton* was a war test, a flexing of military muscles.

But not this alone. The war-head of the Viking rocket did not contain explosives. Instead it was jam-packed with instruments and electrical equipment sending back to the vessel a continual stream of data on pressure, temperature, cosmic ray intensity, and all those other upper-atmosphere fact in which science is so interested.

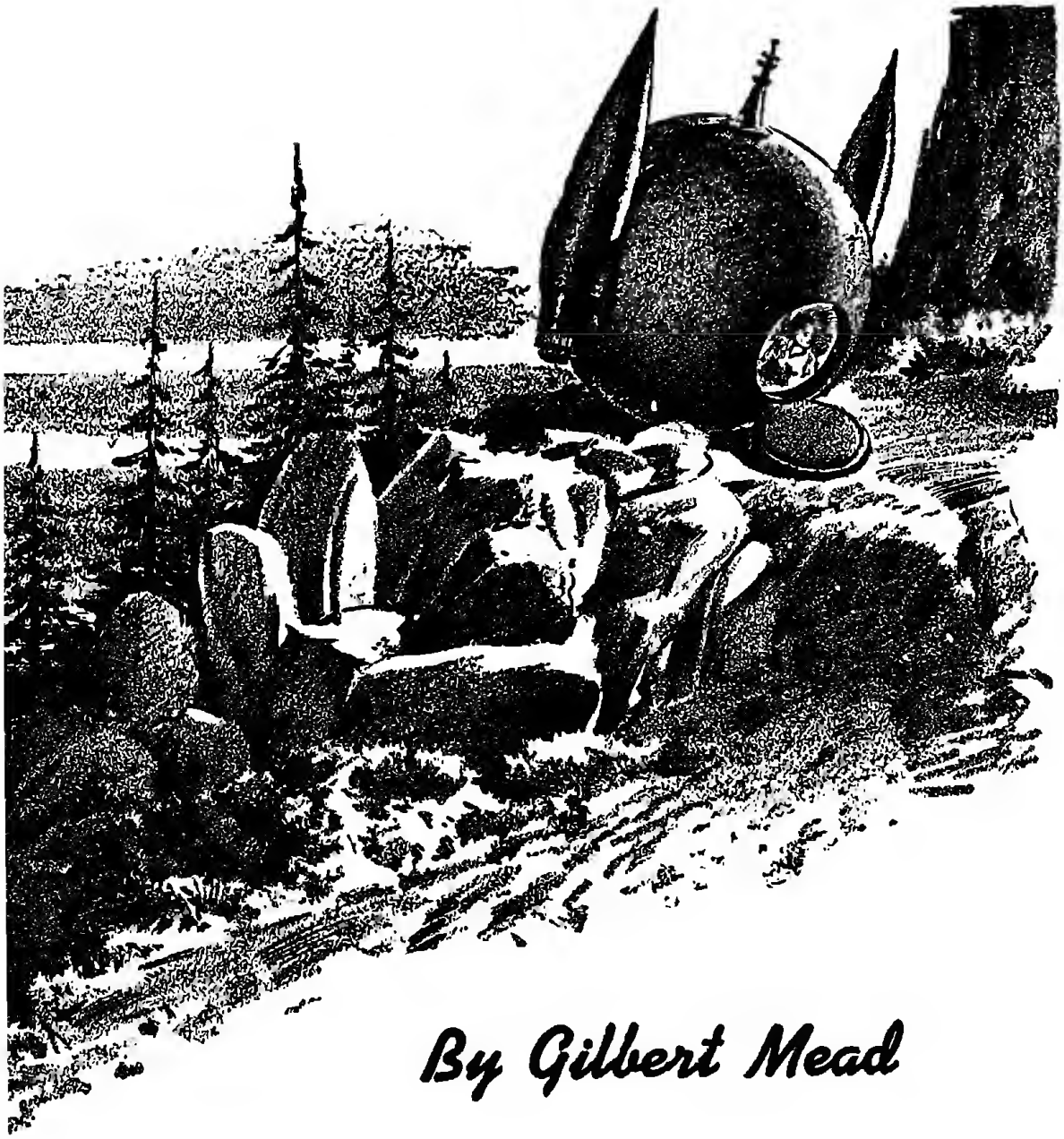
Other than these basic facts no details were released of the behavior of the rocket except that it landed in the sea and no attempt was made to recover it. The rocket's life was ephemeral, but in that brief existence it sent forth a wealth of data, whose effect will be found in subsequent tests and flights. American rocketry is really coming of age!

TIME is a COFFIN

Somewhere in the heart of a savage world was the answer to a strange question: how can a man die centuries before his birth?



Even with the arrow stinging painfully, he continued to run toward the ship...



By Gilbert Mead

THE DOOR of the time ball stood open. Through it I saw a forested slope. Beyond the trees a wide, swift river flowed, silvered by the sun. My watch said barely 8:01. At 8 a. m. we had been still in 1950 A. D.

I looked out again, and disappointment robbed the scene of its primitive beauty. Something had gone wrong. This could not be my native Indiana. The hill I knew so well—the hill on which I had expected to find myself—had been clothed in poplars and oaks and willows. Here were fir and birch and stately spruce.

Marshall Wingfield read my thoughts.

"This is it, Ray. Right time. Right place. When the glaciers began to recede, southern Indiana had what we might call a Canadian climate.

What I saw was a brown face peering from behind a spruce. The face vanished. A feathered arrow sang through the door of the time ball, struck the curved inner wall, and fell at our feet.

Marsh stabbed at a button that closed the door, and we both examined the arrow. It looked much like any other arrow in a good museum exhibit of early Americans.

There was barely room for the two of us in that fantastic, globular machine, and I began to feel caged, sitting there in my bucket seat, but Marsh seemed undisturbed. He fiddled with the dials and controls on the instrument panel. Then he shrugged his wide shoulders, ran a big hand through his thick blond hair, and grinned. The grin was little more than a widening of his mouth. His blue-gray eyes wore a somber look, and I had a momentary hunch that all was not as it should be. I said as much, but Marsh laughed off my doubts.

"Just been getting ready for the return journey," he explained. "Everything's reset for 1950... Well, we can't just sit cooped up here forever. Let's do something."

We took our pistols and a rifle each, and extra ammunition. The door swung open. I looked out, and saw nothing but trees and a distant river. No more arrows came. I dropped to the ground.

Strong arms came from behind me and pinned my elbows. I felt myself pressed to a skin-clad body. My captor lifted me and flung me from him, like a bone from which he had gnawed all the meat. I hit the ground, hard, and all the breath went out of me.

I heard a thud. When I gathered strength to look, Marshall Wingfield was sitting astride a brown back. He had a brown throat in one powerful hand, and dark eyes bulged as the native tried to breathe past those throttling fingers.

We made a neat bundle of our captive. He uttered no sound, but hatred burned in his dark face. Not fear. Hate. We scanned the hillside and saw no one else, but the trees were many and thick; a thousand warriors might have hidden among them.

"At least," I said, "the time ball makes a convenient fort. Let's chuck our boy friend inside and close the door and find the cave."

Marsh looked at me like a man who has eaten a costly dinner in a strange dive and can't find his wallet.

"Sure. Just try to close it. We can't work the door from outside, Ray. I had external controls on the lab wall, but—"

I grunted. This meant that one of us must stay always on guard. Marsh refused to worry.

"We'll manage. Let's try pumping the brown man."

NO GO. Our prisoner spoke just once, in some harsh, guttural, unknown tongue, then spat straight into my face. I wiped away the spittle, and while I wiped a new light began to glow in my mind.

"Look, Marsh. This joker takes us for granted, and he very clearly detests our guts. A big metal contraption appears on his hill. Out of it step big strange men with white skins, and he isn't even fazed."

"That may mean nothing," Marsh said. "Or it may mean plenty."

"It means that we're *not* so strange. He's seen men like us. It means we're neither when nor where we thought. You mentioned a Canadian climate. This Indian—"

"Nonsense. We *have* to be on your hill, Ray. The very hill on which your farmhouse will stand in twenty

thousand years. There's the river, south of us. And this machine can travel only in time."

I had to accept that. Certainly, there south of us rolled the river I had always known. While Marsh stood guard, I set out to find the cave whose startling secret had sent us into this age.

I had found that cave in October, 1949. For generations a berry thicket had hidden it. I had been cutting down that thicket when a rabbit leaped from under my scythe and raced into the entrance. I got a flashlight and crawled through the small opening. What I found there stirred a greater sensation among men of science than Russia's atom bomb. You remember the furore.

From that cave came a human skeleton cased in limestone. Archaeologists said that the limestone had taken twenty thousand years to form. Anthropologists said that the owner of those bones had been a creature amazingly like a modern Scandinavian. Before it was laid in the cave, the body had been severed across the middle as neatly as a steel bar cut by a powerful torch.

The find excited me. I had always been fascinated by the mystery of the Mound Builders whose ancient earthworks dot the Ohio and Indiana countryside. Once those Americans of an unknown age had lived and hunted and tilled the soil where I lived and farmed. Perhaps this skeleton held some clue to their history.

I dug up every available scrap of information about the Mound Builders. I haunted libraries and visited every place within reach where their mounds remained. I talked with scientists who came to see my cave and question me about discovery of the skeleton.

My activities got into southern Indiana newspapers—and that's how I met Marshall Wingfield. He read some of those stories, and came to me with a startling proposition. Why not travel back two hundred centuries—six hundred generations!—and solve the mystery of the unknown race that had once peopled southern Indiana?

Marsh Wingfield's plan was no more fantastic than some of the theories suggested by the finding of those bones. And Marsh was no crackpot inventor of impossible machines. Of that I was sure. If he said he could travel through time, he could. On May 26, 1950, we set out together. Now I walked where my yet undreamed ancestors would, in a distant age, make our family home.

I soon found the cave. I switched on my flashlight and crawled inside again. I had already crawled into this cave twenty thousand years later. The thought made me pause. Almost, it made me abandon my search. I got a new grip on myself and swung the light beam about me.

I FELT the slow, steady, timeless drip of droplets of limestone-laden water from the cave's low, arched roof, and flinched from its touch. This water, falling now upon me, carried with it the calcium carbonate which would shape a limestone coffin for the body I had already found in 1949 A. D.

I used my flashlight to explore every square inch of that small cave. The place was empty. I backed out into the open air, and sat on the ground for a space, cursing softly.

I stumbled back to the time ball. A dream had collapsed. Our eager fantastic mission into a long dead past had failed. Marsh tried to cheer me up.

"Hell, Ray! Why weep? We came

here to study an ancient race, not just to find a body like cops on a homicide case. That corpse may have been left in your cave next year, or three hundred years from now. Those scientists were merely making a shrewd estimate of the age of that limestone. That's all they could do."

Marsh was right, again, but I was disappointed. I had come looking for a body, and there was no body.

Suddenly I realized that the sun was setting, and that took my thoughts off the skeleton I had not found. My watch said 9:24. We had been in this age little more than an hour. It should be only 9:24 a. m., and night was almost upon us. Marsh chuckled.

"Proves I was right. We *are* in 18,050 B. C. It is 6:17 p. m. on April first. We—"

"First of April? It's May 26th! I—"

"April first. I've been doing a little figuring while you were prowling through your cave. Look, Ray. Our watches measure mean solar time. I made all my original calculations on that basis. But the universe runs on sidereal time. Star time. The solar day's longer than the sidereal day. In one year the difference totals three minutes, fifty-six seconds. In twenty thousand years that's fifty-four days, six minutes, and forty seconds. If the sun sets at 9:31 by our watches, we're exactly when we planned to be."

I couldn't argue. But meeting April first on May 26th—well, that seemed reason enough to call it All Fools' Day. And the sun *was* setting, painting the western sky with red and orange and gold. We lifted our Indian into the time ball. I got in with him, and Marsh stayed outside for the first tour of guard duty.

I don't know how long I slept before Marsh roused me to take my turn at sentry go. I do know that Marsh soon fell asleep. I heard his regular breathing. I sat with my back against the hull of the time ball and watched the big yellow moon start her swift descent toward the west. Vivid pictures paraded through my mind. A few yards below me, on the southern slope of this hill, our rambling old farmhouse would stand some day. Farther down, where fir and birch and spruce trees made a dark wall, would run a roadway bordered with poplar and willow and dogwood. Up from the river bank my great-great-grandfather would trudge in his youth to choose this site for his home. Here he would build his first crude cabin of hand-hewn logs. Here—

THE ATTACK came in utter silence. A brown hand pressed against my mouth. Brown claws closed my windpipe. Other hands seized my ankles and wrists. I felt myself lifted and carried swiftly down-hill into the crowding darkness of the towering trees.

From the time ball no sound came. I did not know whether Marsh was alive or dead. I knew only that I was being borne roughly through utter darkness. I knew that we emerged into moonlight beside the broad river, and turned eastward. We came to a village of huts rising dark and eerie from a river bluff. My captors set me down, and one of them pushed me through a door of vertical logs. I heard a heavy wooden bar slammed home.

That thrust at my back knocked me off balance, and I took three swift strides forward to save myself from falling. I brought up against a rough log wall. My foot struck something soft, and a voice cried out in quick pain.

A woman's voice!

I felt for my match case, but that was gone. My pistols were gone, too, and my knife. I tried to feel my way down the wall, and a soft, slender hand came up to guide me. I sat on bare earth, and the hand still on my arm told me that the woman was very near.

"Who are you?" I demanded—then laughed. What folly, to use here a language that would not evolve for nineteen thousand years!

"I am Ingrel Elsbjerg," the voice said—in English. Her unfamiliar accent was not that of a foreigner, bound by the habits of an alien tongue. It was rather as if, in some land and age, her scheme of word stress and intonation might be accepted usage. As if she divined my thoughts, the woman added: "English has been the world language for hundreds of years."

I started to say something and choked it back. Nothing made sense. I began to think that this whole venture into time was only a fantastic dream from which I soon must wake in my own bed in an old Indiana farmhouse. How could any tongue be used throughout the earth, six hundred generations before that tongue developed among the primitive people of early England?

"I am Ingrel," the woman said again. "High priestess of Rok in the Great Temple of Narvik. At least, I *was* a priestess, until the Council banished me to this barbarous age.... You, I am sure, come from the twentieth century of the Christian era."

If this was a dream, it was at least a vivid one.

"From 1950," I admitted, as one might confess "from Brooklyn."

"I have visited your century."

I sucked in my breath, and rubbed my forehead with my free hand, as if that gesture could clear my tangled thoughts. The woman laughed, almost gaily, enjoying my confusion.

"That's why I'm here, in a way. Because I visited your century and made a truthful report of my journey."

I wished desperately that I might see my companion. Seeing her, I thought, might help me hang onto my sanity. I had only her voice, sweet as the song of a cardinal, to keep my belief in reality alive.

"Tell me," I begged.

"I visited your London of 1944, with a temple party assigned to study the pre-Rok antiquities."

"Antiquities? In 1944? Are you crazy?"

THEN I shut up. Each period in human progress is new and modern for a space, before it joins the dead past and becomes in its turn an ancient age for those generations yet to be born. Dimly, then, I began to sense something of the vastness of time.

"There was an air raid. In the darkness a man walked against me and knocked me down. He helped me up and put an arm about me to guide me to the nearest shelter."

I knew an instant of childish, unreasoning jealousy toward the unknown man whose arm had encirled this woman I had not yet seen.

"A priestess of Rok may not permit the touch of any man. The Council knew, because I forgot to conceal it, that I had let the law be broken. They ordered me banished in time, one thousand years for each short year of my life. I am twenty-one."

"You—you come from 2950," I said, and felt unaccountably proud of my feat in simple arithmetic.

I kept the girl talking. When a moment's silence fell, I began to doubt

my own sanity, and each time I prodded her with new questions. She questioned me, too, and I told her what had brought Marshall Wingfield and me into this dead age.

"So you found no body. No skeleton. Of course not. There are no men such as you describe in this age, except yourself and your friend, and—and—Olaf Krigstad, perhaps."

"Olaf Krigstad? Who's he? Where—"

"Temple guard commander at Narvik. He—"

"Narvik? In Norway? I've been there. It's a small—"

"Small? In your time, yes. But you speak of an ancient time. When the polar ice caps melted, and the glaciers vanished, your temperate zone was left dry and barren, or drowned by salt water as world sea levels rose. Chicago is a ghostly ruin in a vast desert. London lies deep beneath the sea. Some five centuries after your time, the remnants of mankind struggled toward the new, fertile lands at the warmed poles. Narvik is the center of the cult of Rok, who foretold the change."

Outside our prison, I supposed, brown warriors stood guard. A few miles away, on a hilltop, the time ball and Marsh—I dared not think of Marshall Wingfield. I had to keep talking.

"Olaf," I prompted. "This Olaf Krigstad."

"It was Olaf's duty to bring me here."

"And now he has returned to 2950?"

"I—I—well, I hope so."

Olaf Krigstad had been more than a temple guard in Ingrel's life, I was sure. Slowly, the story emerged.

Before she became a priestess, Olaf had sought her favor. When her office shielded her from him, he entered the temple service to be near her. Then rejected love begot resentment, and he seemed actually to relish his duty as agent of her exile in time.

"That was yesterday. We landed east of this village, and I was put out of the time-space machine. Olaf offered to stay with me, or to take me to some other age if I would have him, and I—well, I spat at him." She pause. "Not very ladylike, was I?"

I laughed a little over my mental picture of the temple guard commander scrubbing spittle from his face. Ingrel laughed, too, then continued her story.

"Natives appeared, and Olaf cut them down with his ray gun, although they did not seem hostile. I think he did it to make my position here—well, difficult. Two natives escaped, and when the time ball had vanished, they brought me here a prisoner."

THAT explained a lot to me. It told me why the brown man Marsh and I had taken had shown such hatred, so little surprise. It suggested also that Ingrel and I must face the Indians' fiercest vengeance for Olaf's act. For almost the first time I began to think of escape. I felt my way about the small hut. There were no windows. The door was guarded. I heard a man cough.

I saw a little, square hole in the roof, left there to let smoke reach the air. Time after time I sprang upward, trying to get my fingers over the rim of that hole, and once I almost made it, but in the end I had to give up.

I lifted Ingrel to my shoulders, and thrilled to the touch of her warm body so near me. She got her head through the opening, but now even she, so much more slender than I, could not squeeze her shoulders past

it. There was nothing to do but wait for morning, when it might be possible to survey our prison more thoroughly.

I could not sleep, but Ingrel did, at last. She slept with her head on my shoulder. She slept with my arm about her, and once or twice she seemed to try to nestle closer into the shelter of that arm, as if, perhaps, she felt a need for assurance and help.

Dawn came slowly, and then the only light came to us from the hole we could not climb through. Even in that dim grayness I saw how lovely was the woman who shared my cell. She woke and found me watching her, and flushed a little, then snuggled close for a moment longer. With slender white hands she tried to brush her hair into place—shimmering hair like a cloud of ruddy gold above her fair oval face. Red, ripe lips shaped a smile for me.

Ingrel was almost as tall as I. She wore some shiny, clinging, metallic stuff that fitted itself provocatively to every movement of her beautiful, sinuous body.

"I—I am no longer a priestess," she whispered, and her face flamed, and I kissed her. She came closer, I kissed her again.

The door of our prison opened, and an Indian woman entered. I sprang past her, but two guards with spears stepped into my path and drove me back. The woman set a rude wooden bowl on the earthen floor. She stared hard at us, without expression. As she turned away, she kicked the bowl and spilled the food on the ground, and the guards at the door laughed.

My thoughts reverted often during that day to Marshall Wingfield, but with little hope that I should ever see him again. Ingrel and I talked of our past, which lay yet so dimly distant in earth's future, and the comradeship of talk and peril drew us ever closer.

Daylight passed and twilight fell. While the last glow yet lingered, four warriors entered our prison. They spoke sharply, in harsh and guttural words. Ingrel seemed to understand them.

"We must go, Ray. If we have no chance to speak together again—"

"I love you," I said—and realized the truth of those words only as I uttered them. "I won't let these beasts—"

"You will do what you can, I know." I felt the hot pressure of her fingers on mine. "Come."

I took one quick step forward. I would seize the girl in my arms and risk a run through the dusk. Two Indians divined my plan and grabbed my wrists and walked beside me into the gathering night.

WE CROSSED a narrow road to a low hill, about the base of which hundreds of people waited. We mounted a flight of steps cut into the earth. We reached the top, and I saw that this was no natural hill, but a man-built pyramid. Its flat crest seemed some forty feet square, and in the center of that space logs had been piled in a carefully fashioned heap.

Beside the heaped logs waited an aging man with colored feathers thrust into his coarse black hair. A tattooed serpent seemed to have wrapped its coils about his brown torso. His years had wrinkled the thin face and set the mark of his cruelty in his mouth and his eyes.

A dozen braves stood about the old man. One of them held aloft a blazing pine torch, and I guessed the fate they planned for us. I saw the momentary leap of fear in Ingrel's face and knew that she guessed, too. In the eastern sky a huge yellow moon began its upward climb and threw

every figure on that mound into bold relief.

"Both priest and chief," Ingrel whispered. "In twenty-one thousand years the world will be no further. Among my people, too, the priests are chiefs."

The old man stepped to the north side of the pyramid. He lifted his arms and began to speak in a sonorous voice.

"He prays to Niktan," Ingrel said. "To the god of death."

"Our death?"

"Not yet."

The priest-chief moved to face the west, and again he prayed.

"To Ziukut, god of fire."

At south and east rims the old man prayed.

"To Lazot," Ingrel explained, "the earth mother." Then: "To Tonat, lord of creation and god of life."

Our guards seemed almost to ignore us. These primitive, impressive rites absorbed their thought, and I looked about me for some route of escape until the jab of a spear at my back warned me that vigilance had not been relaxed. I spoke to Ingrel again.

"You know their speech?"

"I can figure it out. It's a crude form of Aztec. These are ancestors of the Aztecs, and I have studied the Aztecs in their own time."

Even with a horrible death so near, I found time to marvel at the learning this young girl had achieved, in journeys through the ages. The priest-chief finished his prayers. Up the steps from each side of the pyramid came four warriors, their bodies painted a ghastly white. Each quartet carried a rude litter, and on each litter lay what had been a man.

The braves laid their burdens on the unkindled logs. The old man prayed again, over each corpse. From below rose a wailing that shrilled to a terrible cry torn from a thousand throats. The man with the torch touched flame to each corner of the funeral pyre, and resinous wood blazed high. The fragrance of burning spruce began to blend with the sickening stench of roasting flesh.

The priest-chief faced Ingrel and me. He spoke, and every ear in that assemblage heard. I saw Ingrel's face cloud a little. I saw her bite her lip, then try to smile. I saw her shoulders go back and her head rise as courage conquered fear. Today I know all that the old man said.

"We give our braves to the god of death and the god of fire. We beg the earth mother to take them. We pray that the lord of creation may give them new life. They came among us, newborn, as each of us came among those who were here before us, and now they will come again, as green corn comes after every sowing.

"Of those who slew them, a man and a woman remain. Let these two pay, then, for death with death. Let Niktan have them. Let Ziukut consume them. Let Lazot receive the ashes of their bodies. But if any god grant them new life, let it be their own gods!"

A SCREAM of approval rose from the watching Indians below. Two warriors grabbed Ingrel—*and one was he whom Marshall Wingfield and I had captured!* My heart sank. In the back of my mind there had lingered, until this moment, a tenuous hope that Marsh yet lived, that somehow he could come to our aid. Now that hope died.

The two men dragged Ingrel to the flaming pyre, and the leaping firelight showed fiendish joy in their evil faces. Ingrel turned her face toward me and gave me one last long look.

I sprang from my guards. One pounced at my back. I fought to

shake him off, and precious seconds passed. I knelt swiftly and flung him over my head. I planted a foot in his brown face.

My second guard was at me. I put a knee in his groin. A dozen warriors swarmed over me. I saw Ingrel's guards lift her beautiful body toward the greedy fire.

In that instant the priest-chief threw up his gnarled hands. He staggered forward a step or two and fell face first into the flames and did not flinch from their touch. The braves about me hesitated. Some of them raced to their leader's rescue. I broke loose. I ran, and hooked an arm about the throat of one of Ingrel's guards, and the other loosed his hold on her to tackle me. Ingrel fell, and one hand plunged into the fire as she tried to save herself.

I grabbed a small log by its unburnt end and swung it. I wiped three men from my path and tried to reach Ingrel. A man in some shiny, metallic garb, taller and broader than any of the Indians, ran past me. He aimed a pistol-shaped weapon at two braves, and the upper halves of their bodies toppled into the fire. The man swept Ingrel into his arms and ran to the nearest stairway.

I followed—and there, climbing toward me, Marsh Wingfield came. I yelled, and he turned to clear a path. His Colt barked twice, and after that no one tried to stop us. Marsh thrust a pistol into my hand and raced toward the river bank.

The tall figure bearing Ingrel had started across a plowed field, quartering away from the river. I went that way, too, and Marsh saw and followed.

It had to be Olaf Krigstad. The man from 2950 had stayed behind. He had watched his chance to make Ingrel his own. He reached the far side of the field and plunged into the forest. There I lost him. Marsh caught up with me.

"The time ball, Ray! Compass points to it. Magnetic field set up by the time ball's charge is stronger than the pull of the magnetic pole at this distance."

I did not want to abandon Ingrel, but seeking her and Krigstad in this dense wood was a hopeless task. Marsh and I went straight to our hill. There sat the time ball, its door gaping open. Marsh made a quick check of every control.

"Let's get out of here!" he demanded, but I held back. I tried to tell him about Ingrel and Olaf. I wanted to wait for morning to try to find them. Marsh yielded, and told me how he had fared after I was taken.

"Woke up and found you gone. Decided that the Johnny we had could lead me to you. Pretended to check his bonds and managed to loosen them a little. Pretended to sleep again, and let the fellow escape. Trailed him by daylight and found the town. Had to wait for night, though, to do anything. Almost too late, wasn't I?"

"It must have been you," I said, "who got the priest-chief. Krigstad's Indians were sliced in two by his ray gun."

"I got him," Marsh admitted. "Perfect target, with the fire beside him." He checked his controls once more. "At least, no one damaged our machine. We can still get back to a civilized age."

FROM THE belt of trees below us a voice spoke.

"If you make one hostile move, I can blast you and your time ball out of existence."

The voice had to be Olaf Krigstad's.

"What do you want?" I called.

"The time ball."

Marsh laughed. I wanted to parley, for Ingrel's sake.

"Where's Ingrel?"

"Safe. With me. Yield the time ball, and you may live. I shall take her into another age and bring the ball back for you."

I wanted to believe him. For a moment no one spoke.

"Where is your own machine?" I asked, at last.

"Returned to its own time, without me."

I had to believe that. And I had to save Ingrel from this barbarous age, at any cost. I made a counter offer.

"The ball will hold only two. Let Ingrel go with my friend into our time, and I will wait with you until he returns. I shall wait for the last trip."

"No. Where Ingrel goes, I go, and when she goes."

Marsh whispered to me.

"Keep this joker talking. I'll open the other door, slip out on the other side, and get him from behind."

Almost before he had finished speaking, Marshall Wingfield was on the ground. I repeated my proposition to Krigstad. The voice that answered was Ingrel's.

"Go away, Ray. Never mind me. Olaf can't blast your time ball. His ray gun isn't power—"

Olaf had silenced her, somehow. I heard the bark of a Colt and knew that Marsh had begun his attack. I saw the fiery blast of a ray gun, and prayed that Krigstad had missed his mark. I leaped to the ground and risked a run for the trees. I saw another flash, felt searing heat. I dropped to the grass and crawled forward.

I DID NOT know what I could do. If I found Krigstad, he would almost certainly use Ingrel as a shield. But if Marsh and I got him between us—well, he could not interpose the girl's body on two sides at once. Inch by inch I moved to where Krigstad had been when he last fired but there was no sign of him.

I heard a movement, and fired Marsh's pistol cracked, and I saw the metallic sheen of Krigstad's garb as he passed between me and the time ball. I fired again, and heard Ingrel scream. I cursed, sure that I had hit her. Then I saw Krigstad racing toward the time ball, dragging Ingrel with him.

Marsh shot once, and Krigstad paused to take aim. A small tree crashed as the blast from his ray gun cut through it. Another ray blast blazed, but what its effect might have been I could not tell. I was running toward the man from 2950. I fired again, and Krigstad fell. He rolled downhill toward me, and Ingrel fell away from him and lay still.

I ran to the girl and lifted her up. I carried her up the hill to the time ball.

"I—I'm not hurt," she said. "Where's your friend?"

I did not know. I helped Ingrel through the door of the time ball and went back toward the belt of trees to find him. I called his name, and got no answer. I found him beside a fallen birch, his big and strong body sliced across the middle by the terrible power of Olaf Krigstad's ray gun.

A few yards yawned the entrance of my cave. Gently as I could, I moved the halves of Marshall Wingfield's body inside.

The hours had run swiftly. As I left the cave, the first red tinge of a new day had kissed the sky. Six brown natives were racing toward the time ball. I shot twice, and two war-

riors fell. I fired again, and the pin fell on an empty chamber.

No time to reload. I ran. Behind me, Indians waiting in the forest loosed a storm of arrows. One hit my left shoulder. One tore my left thigh. Still I kept on, because I had to.

I heard four shots, and wondered what new foe was upon us. Two Indians fell at the very door of the time ball. Ingrel had found a gun. I got close enough to bring a pistol barrel down on a brown head. I flun the remaining brave aside. I leaped into the time ball, and kicked the man's face when he came at me again.

Brown men were rushing uphill toward us. A spear struck the hull of the time ball and shattered there. An arrow broke against the inner wall above Ingrel's head.

"The doors, Ingrel! Those two buttons, there at your left!"

Slowly, both doors swung to. And under the drip of lime-stone-laden water in a small cave lay the body I had traveled twenty thousand years to find.

THE THINKERS THINK

By CHARLES RECOUR

IT IS ONLY natural to inquire into the nature of invention and discovery in the light of how the world has been changed in the last century—and how it is likely to change in the next. Consequently, a number of psychologists and philosophers have begun inquiring into the ways in which human beings invent and discover. The facts unearthed by physiologists and the tremendous insights offered by those scientists who work with calculating machines offer additional inducement to consider this fascinating subject.

How does an invention come about? There is a school of thought which maintains that the times are ripe for a given discovery and that its creation is almost inevitable. To support their theory they point out the definite fact that frequently —more often than not—the same invention appears at the same time in widely separated places. This view in undoubtedly true to a certain extent but it does not explain the process which goes on in the mind of the individual inventor.

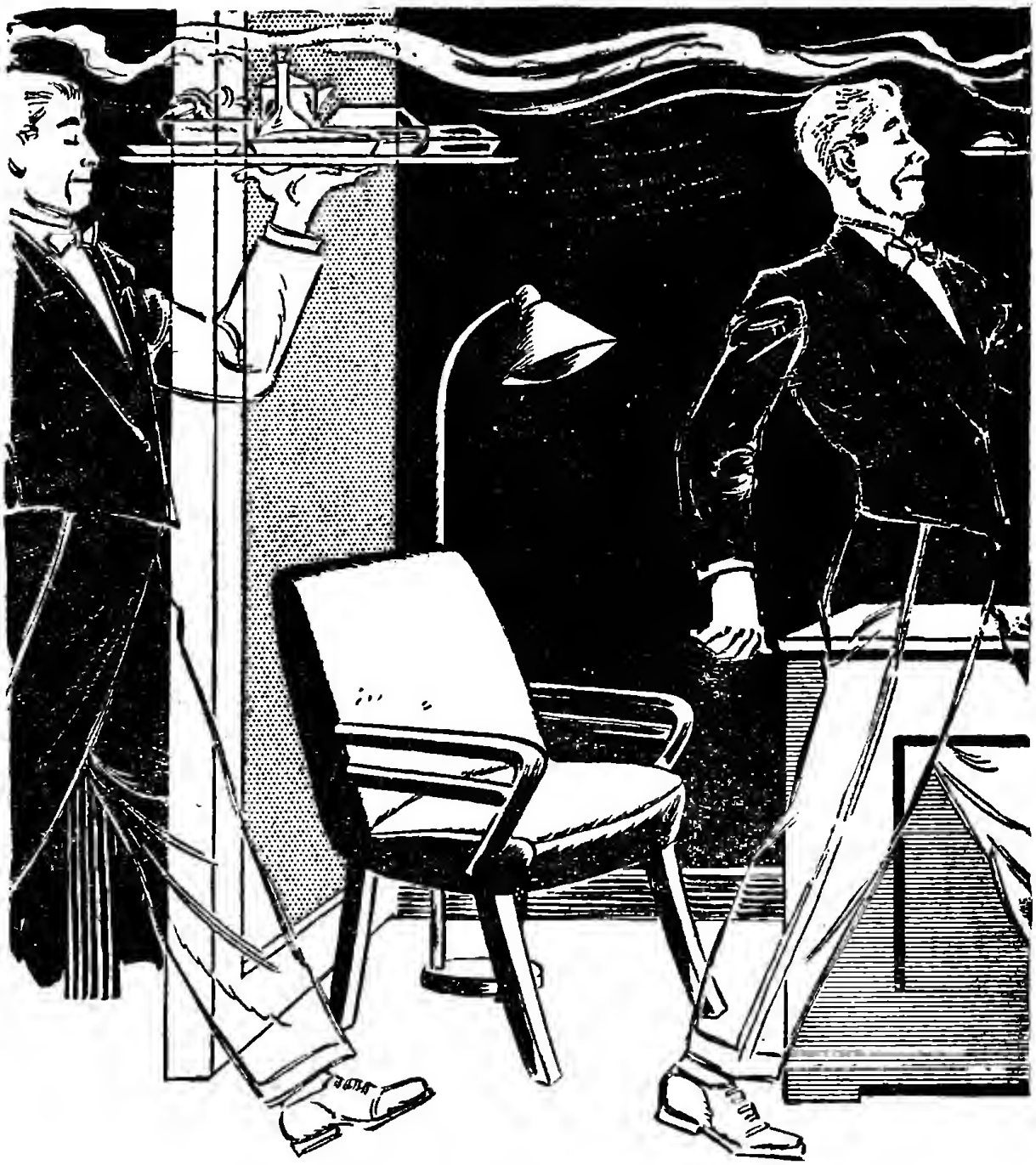
Consider two persons observing a phenomenon or being confronted with a problem of any sort. Why is it that from the problem one will deduce a whole chain of reasoning arriving at an invention or a discovery while the other will be completely unaffected. It is not a matter specifically of education either. Many great inventors and researchers have been poorly self-educated or incapable of seeing the familiar mathematical relationships that another will see.

We speak of individual inventors because the research which results in invention, the research of great companies employing hundreds of men, partakes really of the nature of hack work, rather than inventive genius itself.

When you let the inventors speak for themselves, asking them what went on in their minds prior to a discovery, almost invariably with a few exceptions, they are unable to give a coherent clear answer. "It just occured to me," or "I saw it suddenly," they reply. Occasionally one may give a cold deliberate analysis of how he proceeded from the thought to the deed. But this is rare in straight invention. In mathematics, articulate workers in the field can often demonstrate clearly the chain of reasoning they employed, but in the world of physical invention, the invention of a motor or a machine or an electrical gadget does come out that simply.

The purpose of this research is definite. It has an aim. Because the progress of the world hinges so greatly on what material advances come from the human brain, it is desirable to discover how deliberate creation may be made with the hope of changing things. So far, this objective seems far away.

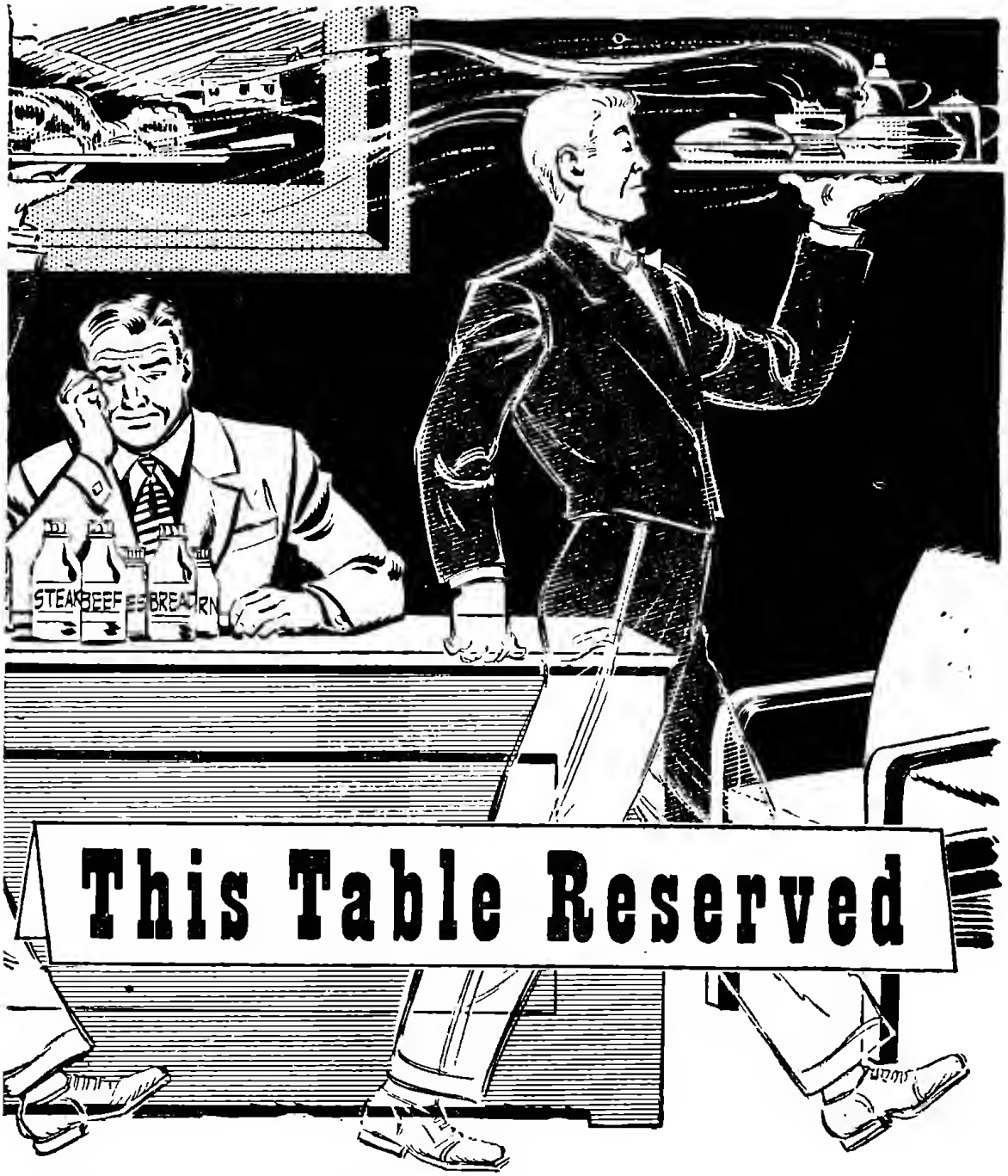
Perhaps with the further use of calculating and thinking machines, which really do ape the human mind in almost every respect, we shall be able to obtain a clue to the unique thought process of invention. Certainly the field is promising. It now appears that we shall know nothing of thinking and thought processes until we learn the mechanics of the human brain—which is so similar to the mechanics of the calculating machine. Then perhaps we can set these gadgets to grinding out inventions as well as solving problems!



By Gilbert Grant

One by one the waiters seemed to float past him each carrying a tray of delectable dishes . . .

When a man hands the waiter the menu and says: "One order of everything!" he's either hungry, crazy — Or out of the past!



This Table Reserved

THE EXECUTIVE looked at the brownish ball with vast distaste. The ball was about the size of a walnut and with as many wrinkles. The Executive looked up, peering near-sightedly over the rims of his rectangular glasses.

"What is it?"

"Try it, sir," the Technician suggested.

The Executive popped the ball into his mouth, chewed dispiritedly at it and swallowed it. He continued to look questioningly at the other.

"Ham and Swiss cheese on rye, sir."

"Oh. No pickle?"

"That," said the Technician, giving the Executive a knowing look, "is

the next step."

The Executive nodded thoughtfully, then waved the Technician away. The world of synthetic foods would soon be complete, with the crowning achievement of a pickle for a sandwich. He had only to look away from the orderly desk top and he would be confronted by the thousands of dummy pills, each a unit of synthetic food. A small shudder shook the portly frame. Better to think of... His hand slid the center drawer open and brought out the six slivers of yellowed ivory he had found one day at an antique dealer.

Tooth picks.

Six of them. He played with them; now he formed them into a square, now a rectangle, and now a star. But always they represented their true meaning. Slivers of ivory which you used to pick particles of food from between your teeth. Real food. Something the world hadn't known for two hundred years.

The tooth picks went back into the drawer. Now the hand brought out dozens of folders, all of them showing signs of age. He flicked one open and read aloud: *"Escalope de Foie Gras Nuit."* Goose liver with macaroni and cheese. A trickle of saliva formed at the back of his mouth. Another *entree* caught his eye: *"Chicken Marengo"*. French fried chicken. Now there was moisture at the corners of his mouth. He closed the folder hurriedly. He dared not think about it any more.

But some of the folders bore colored pictures. Visions of *Chateaubriand* floated before him, clouds of creamy chocolate sauces, covered with snowy whipped cream drowned him, he sniffed a phantom *Tournedoes a la Metternich,* and it was too much. His hand leaped to the inter-com.

"Miss Smith. Do I have anything on the schedule for the next half hour?"

Her metallic impersonal voice came back: "No, sir."

"Good. I do not wish to be disturbed."

HIS FINGERS made quick tapping noises on the desk for a second. Then he rose and sauntered to the door at the rear. He gave a hurried, worried look over his shoulder as he opened it. For an instant he thought he had caught the sound of something at the opposite door. Nothing. His glasses slipped down the thin bridge of his nose and his fingers trembled noticeably as he slipped them up again. There was a narrow spiral of stone stairs. He continued to throw worried glances over his shoulder as he mounted them.

At the top he was halted by a plain door. His knuckles rapped twice, three times, then twice again. The door opened. A tall, stooped man stood before the Executive. The man was dressed in the smocked coveralls of a Technician.

"Come in. Come in," the Technician mumbled. "I think, I think I have our problem solved."

The Executive felt his breath quicken as he closed the door behind him. His ears were waiting for the message, but his eyes were rivetted on the barred globe standing in a corner. The worried look had given way to one of deep excitement. His eyes glowed, his small outthrust mouth, round and puffy as a child's, made little smacking sounds of content. He moved toward the globe with steps that were almost dancing. The metal of the bars was smooth and cold and felt good, and though he had seen the interior a dozen times, he let his eyes linger on each dial, each tube, each intricate wire.

The Technician said: "Our four-legged friend came back this morning.

Good as when it left. The time-machine is a reality."

The Executive turned slowly. "A reality. Truly the scientific achievement of the age."

Lines of worry made shallow valleys in the skin of the Technician's forehead. "But to so small a purpose. . . ."

"I have paid you well," the Executive said. "And the glory will be yours alone. I merely wanted to be the first to use it."

"I don't understand, sir," the Technician replied. "To go back through time for nothing more than a meal."

"A meal! My dear friend, how little you understand. A short while ago a Technician brought me a brown pill, and told me it was a ham and Swiss cheese sandwich on rye. The first time they have been able to make a sandwich. There was awe in his voice. Now he is going to try for the pickle.

"Twenty years I have been tasting the accomplishments of the Technicians. Thousands of pills have gone down my gullet. All sizes and colors. Do you know how tired one can get of pills?"

The Technician shook his head.

The Executive went on: "You take a pill from a bottle marked, "White meat of Chicken", and a pill from a bottle that is marked, "Gravy", and a pill from a bottle marked, "Rye Bread", and a last pill from a bottle marked, "Catsup", and what do you have in your stomach?"

"A full meal."

"Four pills."

The Technician looked worried.

"That is why I helped you when you came to me and asked for money to build your dream. Gave you this loft. Kept this secret. Because I want to go back to the time when eating was a pleasure. Am I being dishonest, Raeburn? Tell me."

"No. Peculiar would be the better word."

"I don't want to be dishonest. I think that if anyone should call me that, I would not do what I want."

THE TECHNICIAN smiled, and the Executive saw there was nothing of derision in the smile.

"Raeburn, listen!" The Executive's voice took on a tone of ecstasy. "In order to give the people a full range of synthetic foods I was forced to go to the Archives and dig up every menu I could find, from all the fabulous dining places of the past. Ah! I found the very one I am going to dine in, first. A place called the Gourmet's Club. There were finer, more luxurious places. The Pump Room of the Ambassador East; The Penthouse Club in New York, Antoine's in New Orleans, and scores of other places. But the Gourmet Club was here in Chicago, and their menu had everything the others had. Lobster a la Newburg was their specialty."

"But how will you manage it?" the Technician asked.

"I will take my annual two-week vacation in a couple of days. I will not leave a forwarding address, then I will not have to lie. Afterward, Raeburn, dear friend, the time-machine is yours to do with as you will."

The Technician patted the rounded shoulders.

A sudden thought struck the Executive. Why not go to the Gourmet Club for lunch? This very afternoon! Another thought came. The President of Synthetic Foods had mentioned he might stop in... But that would not be for lunch. By all that was Synthetic, he *would* go to the Gourmet Club for lunch!

"Well," said the Technician, "there's no reason why it can't be done."

"Good. I'll be back presently. Just going down to tell my secretary that I'm going out to lunch." The tired

eyes behind the rectangular glasses sparkled with humor. "I wonder how she'd take it, were I to tell her where?"

Raeburn was making some last adjustments when the Executive returned. "I don't want anything to go wrong," Raeburn said. "Nothing should." He handed the Executive a thick disc and went on: "Your compass, sir. It works somewhat on the order of the ancient Geiger counter. It too registers radiations. The waves set up by Silium bars register on the counter, and the pulsing bar, that metal ridge on the surface, will pulse with greater strength, the closer you come to the time-machine. The dials are set for you. But you must not take more than an hour and a half, altogether. I hope you have a pleasant trip, sir."

"Pleasant?" asked the Executive as he made himself comfortable. "I'm going to eat my fill!"

The Executive looked between the bars, waved back at the Technician, then flicked the "on" switch. Instantly, the room disappeared. The bars were like a solid sheet of light before his eyes, so swiftly did the machine rotate on its axis. He felt a wave of nausea which by sheer will power he repressed, then suddenly the slight motion of the machine was stilled, and clear vision returned to the Executive.

HE WAS in the midst of a prairie. But not a large one, nor one far from the city. For rising out of the near foregound was the framework of a huge factory. To his right at a distance of a hundred or so yards, he could see a wide road and the traffic that filled it. He knew he was invisible while he was in the confines of the machine, and he allowed himself a few seconds of orientation. The city of his own time was a much larger one than this.

The door swung open on its invisible hinges and closed again. He could see nothing. But he could feel the pulsing bar beating strongly on the disc in his pocket. He turned from the machine, marked its location in his mind, and started for the road.

He had landed in a fortunate spot. It was only a short distance from an outlying cab stand. And presently he was in a cab, and watching the view of the city's approach. Then, almost before he thought possible, the cab slid to a stop at the curb before a faded red brick building, and the cab driver was saying:

"The Gourmet Club, sir."

He paid the driver with a five dollar bill, told him to keep the change, and stood with an odd air of reverence before the entrance for a moment. Then the doors closed behind him, and he was walking on the deep-piled carpet, past the check room, and up the four steps leading to the restaurant itself.

He had come in the very middle of the lunch hour.

The room had a quiet elegance. The decor was simple, the color scheme soft and subdued. There was neither orchestra nor music, and it was obvious that everything had been done to bring people together for the sole enjoyment of what the Gourmet Club boasted—its food!

A man in a dinner jacket came over to the Executive. He held a long white card in his left hand.

"Your name, sir?"

"Trudel," said the Executive.

"Trudel? I don't see it here. Did you have a reservation?"

"Reservation?" Trudel hadn't thought of such things. He slipped a bill from his pocket. "Why, no, I don't."

"I'm sorry, sir. Tables are reserved during lunch and dinner hours."

"Oh. Well, perhaps this will make it easier to forgive my ignorance," Trudel said, slipping the bill to the other. He saw he had given the man a ten-dollar bill, but let it pass. What did money mean at a time like this?"

He saw, however, that it meant a lot to the man in the dinner jacket. The man's eyes went wide for an instant, then narrowed. His voice was edged with respect: "Pardon me, sir. An oversight. This way, please. . ."

The card on the table before which they stopped, read, "This Table Reserved". The man in the dinner jacket took the card from the rack and crooked a finger toward a waiter and bus boy. Presently there was water on the table and a full array of silver, and most important, a menu.

Trudel sighed deeply. How well he knew this menu. He could close his eyes and recite it from memory. He closed his eyes.

A voice said, "Mind if I sit with you, mister?"

TRUDEL opened his eyes and peered over the flat rims of his glasses. There before him was a slender man of medium height, whose clothes seemed a little extreme. The man had a narrow, pointed face, a nose that was long and thin and had been broken close to the bridge at one time so that it humped suddenly. Grey eyes were set rather close to the long, thin nose.

"Missed my reservation," the stranger explained. "I always eat here, but George sometimes gets fussy, especially when the boss is around."

"Not at all," Trudel said. "I like company. It would be a pleasure."

"The name's Carney. Gil Carney."

"Trudel, sir. J. R. T. L. Trudel. Honored."

"Yeah? Uh, me too," Carney mumbled.

Trudel smiled and turned to the waiter. He laid the menu on the table and said, smiling in gentle anticipation, "All of what is on the menu."

"All?"

"All."

"All. . . ?"

"*All!* . . .

The waiter nodded dumbly and moved off. Trudel turned back and saw that Carney's eyes were wide and set, and his mouth hung open in sickly fashion.

"Nobody," Carney said, "could be that hungry."

"Obviously," Trudel returned, "this one is."

"Well, it's your gut. But you're gonna be here a long time."

"What do you mean?"

"Huh! You must be a stranger here! Some of that stuff takes a half-hour to cook. But maybe you know what you're doing. Maybe you got all day."

"But I don't have," Trudel couldn't keep the panic from his voice. "I now have," he looked at his wrist chronometer, "forty minutes."

"You shoulda ordered the lunch, mister," Carney said. "With luck, you'd have gotten it."

"Do me a favor, Mr. Carney. . . ?" He saw the other's eyes narrow in suspicion, and hastened to reassure him. "I mean I must be leaving. Would you cancel the order for me? And tell the man I'll be back tomorrow."

Carney heaved his narrow shoulders in a shrug. "Sure, pal."

The man in the dinner jacket looked up in time to see Trudel leave but Trudel waved him away. "Be back tomorrow."

Finding the time-machine was not too difficult. The counter Raeburn had given Trudel worked perfectly. The Executive seated himself and flicked the "on" switch once more, but

this time with a feeling of disgust. So near, and so little time. He hadn't thought how much of it was needed. His last thought, as the machine started to whirl, was perhaps he'd have time for a ham and Swiss cheese sandwich on rye, when he got back. And maybe they would have the pickle by then.

"PLEASE tell me the effects of traveling through the space-time continuum." The Technician could think of nothing else.

But Trudel was still deep in disgust with himself for not having planned his little excursion with more foresight. He gave the other a curt shake of the head and started for the door. By the time he reached it his anger was dissipated. He turned and said:

"I'm sorry. Well, all I can say is, there was a sort of empty feeling in me, then the bars moved so quickly it seemed I was enclosed in a sheet of solid light...."

"I was right. Completely so!" The Technician clapped his hands in an almost childish display of content. "You were in a ball of light for an instant. Time stood still in space, but space moved as light. It doesn't seem to make sense..."

"What is the difference what it seems to make. We *know* what happens. That is all that matters."

Trudel went on out, thinking of ham and cheese, on rye.

"THIS TIME," Trudel said as he seated himself in the machine, "I will spend the whole afternoon. It is all arranged. I have an appointment with the President at four, and nothing of importance till then. I told my secretary a little lie, but not a dishonest one. I said I was going to be out all afternoon. Truthfully, I am going to be in."

Once more Raeburn waved and once more there was that feeling of emptiness as Trudel flicked the switch, and again the solid sheet of blinding light. And once more, an instant later, the prairie.

This time there was a short line of people waiting to be let into the dining room. Trudel masked his patience as best he could. He wasn't going to make the same mistake twice. He had memorized a list of the dishes he wanted and would give them to the waiter instantly. Trudel was prepared to spend three hours in dining, this afternoon.

He noticed that there was another dinner-jacketed man who was acting as major domo this afternoon. Then he caught sight of the one named George. He was standing to one side, deep in conversation with Gil Carney.

Trudel saw George make several angry gestures, then reach into his pocket and bring something out. Carney took the piece of paper, studied it for a second or two, then placed it in his own pocket, after giving George a piece of paper in return. By this time Trudel was at the head of the line.

Both George and Carney saw him at the same time.

George reached him first. "Ah, Mr. Trudel. Mr. Carney told me what happened yesterday. I hope you have more time today?"

"A great deal more."

"Good! This way, please."

It was the same table. Only now Carney was seated at it. "You forgot to reserve, and I figured you'd be in, so I saved this table for us."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Carney..."

"Gil," Carney broke in. "Use the front handle."

"Thank you. Today I think I have enough time. I have just the dishes in mind to order."

"Yeah. Might as well eat, first..."

There was an odd inflexion to Carney's voice.

It irritated Trudel. But the waiter arrived and there was no time for introspection. Trudel gave his order quickly. Lobster a la Newburg-thermidor, and a *Chateaubriand* to follow, rare.

TRUDEL turned to find Carney studying him. There was a twisted smile on the man's thin lips. Trudel suddenly didn't care too much about Carney's company.

"You're pretty cute," Carney said.

"Cute? How do you mean?"

"George, the captain, was hoping you'd show, so he could have you pinched for shoving the queer."

"I don't understand."

"Queer. Counterfeit money. That ten-dollar bill you gave him. It was phony."

"That's ridiculous! That bill was as genuine as the Treasury."

Carney's right hand disappeared. When it came into view again there was a greenback in it, the same one Trudel had given George the day before. Carney said so.

"...I told him you were one of these rich jokers. I made the sawbuck good by giving him one of my own. I figured it'd be a good deal."

"How do you mean, a good deal?"

"Well, I don't know yet... But I'll find an angle. Y'see, I'm a business man. In a small way, of course. An angle here, an angle there, and a buck comes easy. Like maybe with you. The trouble with this bill is, it won't be good till 2550 A. D. I can't wait that long."

Trudel felt a tug of horror. He hadn't thought of that. Carney was right, of course. Trudel should have obtained money of this era. He searched the narrowed grey eyes before him, tried to read what he saw, but couldn't. Yet he couldn't believe Carney was attempting anything dishonest. Just that the man had a mean, small animal look about him—

"Y'know," Carney continued, "I ain't the smartest guy in the world. An' by the same token you ain't the dumbest. This sawbuck could pass any teller, until they saw the date and like where it says, 'Ministry of the Treasury'. Now that don't make sense. It didn't to me!" He paused and let his eyes fall. Trudel wondered why. When Carney started to talk again it was on a different tangent. "I'm going to give you a break and not turn you in. But you gotta play ball with me. Maybe we can both make some real money?"

The horror was now panic. "Turn you in" could only refer to the authorities. Trudel knew he couldn't permit that to happen. "What do you propose?"

Carney looked up, saw the waiter was at hand with Trudel's food, and said, "Go on, eat. I'll think about it."

Trudel looked at the dishes, the taste-tantalizing dishes, the hunger-evoking dishes, the luscious-looking dishes, and knew they would taste like one of the pills from the laboratory. His appetite had fled....

"WELL," SAID Carney, wiping his lips with a swipe of the napkin. "Guess you wasn't hungry, after all. Too bad. They got good food here."

"I—I'm not hungry."

"Let's talk, then. Am I right about you being from this date on the bill?"

Trudel gave the matter swift thought. It was obvious Carney had cunning, but Trudel couldn't understand what the man wanted. He decided to tell Carney the whole story....

"Just to eat a real meal?" Carney sounded incredulous.

"Yes."

"Well, go ahead. Don't let me stop you. The lobster's no good, now. But that filet with the bacon on it is okay."

Trudel thought: Well, now. Perhaps I've misjudged him. He seems genuinely concerned. He nodded abruptly, and cut a generous slice of the filet and put it in his mouth. His teeth clamped down into the meat but though he worked his jaws nothing happened. After a moment he lifted his napkin to his lips and spat the pulpy remains into it and laid the napkin to one side.

"What's wrong?" Carney asked.

"My teeth. Through disuse they're not strong enough. All that lovely meat..." There was a trace of tears in Trudel's voice.

"Oh! Tough, tough! Tell you what, Trudel. All you want's a meal. And you're coming to stay for two weeks. Right?"

"Very. That is I was. Now..."

"You still can. I'll help you, if you help me. Wait a minute. Let me talk. You knew about this place so you got records, or maybe newspapers of this year...?"

"Of this day, if you wish."

Carney's eyes sparkled suddenly. "Now I know I can help you. Pal, by tomorrow noon you'll be able to eat a steak twice this size. You can make book on that."

Trudel said nothing, but for the moment he forgot his hunger.

"It's like this. When you go back get hold of the paper for tomorrow and turn to the sports page and get the names of six winners at some of the tracks. Write 'em down and bring 'em with you. How about that?"

"It doesn't seem too difficult."

Carney's eyes suddenly narrowed. "Can I trust you? After all once I do what I got to for you, all you gotta say to me is, "Blow." How about *that?*"

"My friend!" Trudel's tone left no doubt that he was insulted. "I have never been accused of dishonesty. There is no reason for it in our time. I pledge my word that I will do whatever you wish, if you help me."

"Shake on that," Carney said. He extended his hand. Trudel shook it. "Now let's get to a friend of mine, a dentist. You need caps on those baby teeth of yours."

IT WAS the second day now since the caps had gone on. The food tasted every bit as good as Trudel had imagined. Carney sat opposite, engrossed in the lists Trudel had brought back with him. Carney was comparing them with the results he had cut out of the daily papers. He looked up, a scowl darkening his forehead.

"Is that all you think about—food?"

Trudel got the last bit of taste from the piece of veal he was chewing, swallowed it, and said: "While I'm here."

"Are you sure you can get away every day?"

"Yes. I arranged to come into the office for an hour or so during the day. It didn't make sense but since that was what I wanted, the President is letting me take my vacation that way. Otherwise I could never get into the loft where the time-machine is housed."

"Okay. Well, you haven't missed on these races. So I think we'll go to work today. This afternoon. Now here's the set-up. You'll go in and make the bets..."

"I? Why not you?"

Carney looked down at the sheets again. "It's like this, pal. They know I'm a sharpie and if I start beating them books they'll throw me out, figuring I got angles. But you. Huh! Who would take you for a con man?" He looked up, eyes blandly innocent.

"Here's twenty dollars. The book is in this building, room 525. And here's the list. Bet the horses in the order I've got them. And don't bet more than twenty on each horse. On the nose."

"The nose? While they're running?"

"Before they start, when they call post time."

"Suppose the money falls off?"

"Falls off of what?"

"Their noses?"

Trudel thought the other was having an apoplectic stroke. The blood flushed his face brick-red, and veins stood out on either side of the scrawny neck. Even the eyes seemed to fill with blood. Trudel wondered what had brought it on.

"Look, Trudel, *pal!* The horses aren't running upstairs."

"You said they were."

It was obvious Carney was making an effort to control himself. "They're running at the track," he spoke softly, deliberately. "But we're not at the track. That's why they have books. So people don't have to go to the tracks. Now just go upstairs and tell the cashier you want to bet twenty to win on Lady Fingers in the second at Arlington. Got it?"

Trudel held up the money the other had given him. "Yes. Right here."

Carney sounded just weary: "Okay. Take it upstairs and do what I asked."

IT WAS A large square room. Trudel got an impression of confusion, as he entered. A loud speaker was blaring something about "win, place and show," men were moving swiftly toward several windows, other men stood on a raised platform and marked sheets with crayon, and other men simply stood around in small groups and argued with one another. None of it made sense to Trudel.

But he had to do something, he knew.

The cashier, a hungry-looking man with a wide nose, said nothing.

"Is there a horse named Lady Fingers?" Trudel asked.

"The sheets is on the wall, buddy," the cashier said morosely.

"Yes. I saw. But about this horse... Is there an animal of that name running? At Arlington Park, I believe it is?"

"I don't care if it's Lincoln Park. The sheets is on the wall."

"I understand!" Trudel said impatiently. "Why must you repeat? I asked..."

"The sheets is on..."

"The wall."

"Yeah. And they got numbers, and names. Get the number of the nag, and you better hurry. The second at Arlington goes off pretty soon."

So he *did* know! Trudel was completely bewildered as he strolled the length of the platform. If he understood, why hadn't he answered? He saw then why he hadn't. Beside the names of the horses were numbers. So that was it!

That was it.

Lady Fingers' number was 201.

Lady Fingers won by three lengths, according to the announcer. And paid ten to one. There was surprise in the cashier's morose eyes as he handed Trudel his winnings.

"Number 325 in the fourth at Keeneland," Trudel said.

"You're loinin', buddy. Don't loin so fast."

Number 325, a horse named Gimpsy, paid six for one. Carney was doing all right, Trudel thought. It was obvious Carney had a good sense of business. Certainly this was going to be a profitable afternoon.

It was. Two thousand dollars worth.

Carney counted the money twice. His smile filled his thin mouth almost from one ear to the other. "Fine! Fine! Now listen, pal. There's a fight

going on tomorrow night between 'Slugger' Hayes and a boxer named Garret. The fix is supposed to be in on Garret. Get the dope on it for me."

"That shouldn't be difficult. I have the papers for the next three days. Got them from the Archives of the Past."

"So why don't you bring the paper instead of horsing around this way?"

"Oh, no! They simply won't let them out of the Record Room. Too perishable."

"Okay, forget it. Don't forget. The Garret-Hayes fight."

Trudel said he wouldn't forget. He finished the last of the after dinner coffee, nodded gravely, and left.

"ARE YOU sure Hayes is goin' to win?" Carney demanded.

"Oh, yes. It seems that there was some blood spilled—Mr. Hayes' blood—and Mr. Garret slipped in it, just as Mr. Hayes delivered a wild swing. The blow caught Mr. Garret on a vulnerable point, and as a consequence, the fight ended then and there."

"How nice."

Trudel thought he detected a note of sarcasm, but wasn't sure. It was becoming more and more difficult to understand Carney. Sometimes Trudel had a dim suspicion not all was as honest with Carney as he wished it were.

"I don't like fighting," Trudel said. "Arguments can be settled by other means. *That* is a matter, however, the world will have to discover for itself, in due time."

"Try it on a soap box," Carney said. "But about the fight. The odds are three to one on Hayes. By tonight the smart money will get on and the odds'll swing. Like to see a fight, Trudel?"

"Not particularly. But it would be a novelty."

"Okay. And just to make time pass go up to 525 and bet a hundred each on Milord in the second at Keeneland, and Haven's Rest in the sixth at Laurel."

Trudel suddenly remembered something. "That cashier upstairs..."

"Yeah? What about him?"

"He said something strange to me, when I collected my last bet. He said, "You don't look that smart, buddy! Comin' back?" What did he mean?"

"It means when you cash your second bet—and by the way, there's going to be a change in the betting. What you win on the first horse put on the second. Anyway, when you cash the second bet, a guy's gonna tap you on the shoulder and tell you Al wants to see you. That'll be Al Lafredo, the boss. Go on in the office and if he gets smart just ask him if he wants to keep booking your bets, an' if he don't, you'd take your money somewhere else."

"In other words, not to be frightened?"

"Right."

The horses won, as usual, and this time it was Carney who called the turn. A husky individual with the broken face of an ex-prizefighter, tapped Trudel as he was collecting his money.

"Say, Jack. Al'd like to see you for a minute."

AL LAFREDO was a squat, swart-faced man with dark eyes, and strong nose and chin. A cigar jutted from a corner of his mouth. His somnolent eyes peered narrowly into Trudel's. Trudel gauged this man as the sort who would stop at little short of murder, and if the cause warranted, even murder.

"You been doin' all right, friend," Lafredo said.

Trudel turned his eyes from the other and peered at the very business-like office. He had thought it would look different, somehow. Well, since it was a business, Lafredo couldn't complain.

"I ask you something, friend?" Lafredo spoke a bit more sharply.

"You *told* me, not asked," Trudel said. "Very well, indeed. Why?"

"I just like to know where you gettin' the steer."

"I don't understand."

"That's what the cashier tells me, you don't understand. But the nags is always comin' in, on the nose. Nobody's that lucky."

"I am," Trudel said. "Now if you feel you no longer want to take my bets, why I imagine there are others."

"Not if I don't want them to," Lafredo said darkly. "An' you're a cinch to spot."

Trudel managed to control his emotions. He believed Lafredo. But why hadn't Carney told him this? Did Carney deliberately let him get involved? If so, why? Trudel decided to brazen this out.

"If you're afraid I'll win too much money then I suppose I'll have to stop betting. But since you say you're so strong, I don't know why you're afraid."

"I'm not afraid of anything a punk like you can do, or win. Maybe you're just lucky. I hope so. It might be tough if you're pulling a fast one."

There was nothing else said. The interview was over.

TRUDEL let his face show nothing of what was troubling him, when he returned to the Gourmet Club. And for the first time since the first afternoon, he had no appetite. But he pretended to enjoy his food, as usual. Carney seemed lost in thought. Now and then his lips moved silently, but for the most part he thought without motion.

"Carney," Trudel said, peering at the other over the rim of his coffee cup. "Why do you want all this money. Do we split these winnings?"

The words jerked Carney out of his mood. Trudel was quick to note the sudden pallor. Then a tremulous smile broke, and a second later, Carney seemed his usual self again.

"Any time you say, pal," Carney said. "But I figured this dough can't do *you* any good. It'd be like having a lot of your dough here."

It was a plausible enough answer. Then why had Carney paled?

"Something bothering you, pal?" Carney asked.

Something was, Trudel thought. But he couldn't say anything to the other.

"Okay, pal. Tell you what. Tomorrow I'll make my big killing. You saw Al Lafredo, eh?"

"Yes."

"What I figured. He ain't so tough. But he scared you. So here's what we do. . ."

Trudel felt irritated at the pronoun. It was always he who did anything. Not that he minded. He had struck a bargain and intended keeping it. But why couldn't Carney face the simple facts?

". . . You go into another book. The biggest in town, no matter what Al thinks. And we'll bet the whole wad on a couple of nags. The take should be about a hundred grand. And when you make the bet if they ask how come, tell 'em the truth. That Al told you to bet it somewhere else."

"But he didn't," Trudel protested.

"He will. Tomorrow. Because you're going to walk in and tell him you want to bet our whole wad on this horse. He'll drop dead before he'll let you. Yeah. He'll tell you to take your money somewhere else. So you'll go to this other guy and tell him Al told you to."

"That isn't quite the truth, Carney."

"What's the difference? Say, pal. You gonna let me see this machine you come in, sometime?"

"I don't see why not. We can go out now, if you'd like?"

CARNEY walked about in a sort of stupefaction. "You say it's here? Where?"

Trudel smiled and handed the other the counter. "Feel the pulsing?"

Carney nodded.

"It's alongside that stump," Trudel said. He took Carney's hand and guided him forward and placed the hand on the bars.

Carney jerked away. "I felt it!"

Trudel found the slotted handle and pulled the door open. Now Carney could see the interior. He marveled at the tubes and coils of wire and the intricate machine which controlled the operation of the time-machine.

Suddenly he became aware of time. "Hey! We better get to the Arena. That fight's going to go on."

"At ten," Trudel said.

"Oh. Yeah. Say, pal. Show me how to work it, huh?"

It was so simple Carney took but ten minutes and he knew precisely what to do. "Hey! I bet I could go around in time, like you. Tell me. What's it like, say twenty years from now?"

"I don't know. I would have to find the papers of those days."

Carney grinned suddenly. Trudel felt a stirring of misgiving at the sight. It was as if Carney had seen something obscene. Abruptly, he closed the door and swung around. "I don't think I'll see the fight. I don't want to take any chances on getting back. There is a watchman late at night."

"Well, then you better blow, pal. See you tomorrow."

THE OFFICE was dark but Trudel didn't need light. He let himself out into the night. The Archives building was but a short distance off. And it was open night and day because of the number of students who made use of it.

Trudel nodded curtly to the uniformed attendant standing guard at the room which housed what he wanted. He stayed within for a rather long time, this night, and when he reappeared, he was pale and agitated.

A street corner kiosk was close by and he used the audiophone to call Raeburn. The Technician must have been asleep by the sound of his voice. But wakefulness came quickly at the urgent accents he heard at the other end.

Trudel said, "Thank you, Raeburn. In a half hour, then," and hung up.

The building watchman made them sign in. He had come strolling up in Raeburn's company. Any other time Trudel would have minded. Not this night, however. Trudel and Raeburn went immediately to the loft.

There, Raeburn took the object Trudel had asked him to bring and attached it to the door of the time-machine.

"Now be careful," Raeburn said in warning as he fixed it so that it was immovable. "Don't get into line with it."

"I won't," Trudel said. "I'll make sure of that."

"I wonder why you want it," Raeburn said.

"Your curiosity will have to wait. Thanks, Raeburn. Luckily for me you collect these things. Well, might as well be off. I must get my sleep, and I know I woke you from yours...."

CARNEY was all smiles as Trudel walked into the Gourmet Club, the next day. He had ordered his

lunch and was almost finished by the time Trudel arrived.

"This is going to be the big day," he chortled. "Yes, sir. The day of the big killing."

"Killing?" Trudel asked softly.

The smile faded from the other's lip as he shot Trudel a quick glance. Trudel merely looked blank. Then the waiter came up and for the next few minutes Trudel busied himself in ordering. Oddly, his appetite seemed to have returned. He ate with a lusty fervor that put Carney's efforts to shame.

At last he pushed the empty coffee cup aside and said, "For the first time I'm replete. I couldn't eat another bite. But let's get to business, eh, Carney?"

"Yeah. About time. I keep wonderin' where you put it all. Well, here's the dough. Ten grand. You bet the whole thing on one horse. According to the sheet you give me this horse pays ten to one, but on the morning line he's a hundred to one. Got it?"

"Give me the name of the horse," Trudel said.

"Wishful, in the fifth at Rockingham."

Trudel nodded. "How much did you win on Hayes, last night?"

"Five grand. From Al Lafredo. He wants to know where I got the info and I says I got a friend. A friend with funny glasses."

"Did he laugh?"

"Why should he? He lost the dough, not me."

"I thought maybe the funny glasses might have given him a chuckle."

Carney's glance shifted under Trudel's steady stare. Then, "Better get going, pal. I want to make sure you get to Al's joint first."

Carney had figured it out rather well, Trudel thought. Al had almost used Carney's exact words. Well, now for the second part. The other bookie was a couple of blocks north. Trudel thought of many things in the walk from one place to another—none of them pleasant.

And Carney proved right again. This bookie gagged a bit at the size of the wager but accepted. The horse Carney had selected was such an outsider that the bookie was barely able to hide a smile.

"Al must have been crazy," he said. "Sending you here. Man! That's found money."

"I don't think Al thinks so," Trudel said.

"He's crazy."

But, as Trudel pointed out, Al wasn't so crazy. The bookie paid off, but there was something in his eyes that said Al Lafredo was not going to be very happy about this. Of course, Al had ideas also, Trudel also knew. But that was no longer important. Getting back to Carney was.

Carney's hand shook visibly as he counted the money. "A hundred grand! Could I make hay with this. Did you bring me the paper I asked about?"

"You know I can't," Trudel said. "I told you that. But this I can tell you. In twenty-five years this prosperity will be at its height, living at its best, and a hundred thousand dollars will be like a million."

"That's what I wanted to know."

"Why?" Trudel asked.

At Carney's sudden grin Trudel knew his suspicions were correct. This man was not honest....

"Oh. Reasons. Say, pal! Come on along with me for a ride."

Trudel agreed. He felt, somehow, that this was the last he was to know of the Gourmet Club. It had been very pleasant while it lasted. It was with an almost sorrowful face that he took his last look as they came down the stairs toward the exit.

CARNEY gave the cab driver directions Trudel couldn't hear. Wherever they were going it was a long ride. South, on the outer Drive, south through Jackson Park, south over the South Shore drive. And then they were in open country.

"Are we going to the time-machine?" Trudel asked.

"Yeah. That's just where we're going."

"Why?"

"I'll tell you when we get there."

Carney waited until the cab had disappeared in the distance before taking his hand out of his jacket pocket. He shifted the small folder in which he had the money, to the other side before removing his hand. When the hand came out there was a gun in it.

"The disc, pal!" Carney said. "And stay just where you are."

"You're not being very smart," Trudel said gently.

"Don't be crazy. *I* was the smart one. What a stooge you were. So you stay with the empty bag and I blow with this dough. There won't be that much of a change in twenty-five years. And what a lump I got to start with. Well, sucker, so long. This gimmik's jumping in my hand like a frog."

Trudel watched with an absolutely blank face while the other slid his hand along the bars for the slotted handle. He saw the look of triumph, saw the finger tighten about the trigger, saw the door open, and heard the sudden roar of the exploding pistol.

Gil Carney was very dead. Trudel didn't need more than one look to see that. The bullet had ripped his chest to shreds. Trudel pried the counter from the lifeless fingers, shook his head in regret and closed the door behind him....

"BUT TELL ME," Raeburn asked, "how did you know it was going to end like that? What made you suspicious of this Carney? And how did you know what he was plotting?"

Trudel sighed. "You, like Carney, forgot that there was more to the papers than just the racing section. But perhaps I was suspicious from the beginning. Actually it wasn't till last night that I was really convinced. And when I became convinced I thought it would only be justice that Carney's end should be arranged by a person from a completely honest world. As a matter of fact the murder is going to be called an unsolved one. But we know, you and I, that Carney was killed by a gun placed within the frame so that whoever opened the door would fire it automatically.

"Ah. You still don't understand?"

"No," Raeburn was nonplussed.

"The newspapers in the Archives. They give a daily record of what happened. That day a man, whose body was identified as Gil Carney, a minor hoodlum, was found in a prairie on the far South Side. What was he doing there? I asked myself. And the answer came. He had asked me about going into the future the day before, had learned how to use the controls, had taken all the money we had won. But even so I might have relented. Then I read further, on another page. Al Lafredo's book had been bombed.

"Al Lafredo, the well-known big shot gambler and hoodlum, had only this to say to your reporter. 'I know who did this. But I ain't mad at him. It's someone else I'm mad at. And when I get him...' Do you understand, Raeburn. Carney had planned the whole thing so that I would be the scapegoat while he went free."

"You would have let Carney keep the money, of course?"

"Of course. He made it a point to show how little it could mean to me.

"Yet how little it meant to him, in the end...."

THE HIDDEN IMAGE

By LESTER BARROW

IT'S HARD to arouse any enthusiasm over such a stuffy old subject as photography—from the technical angle, that is. The art has been with us so long that the average person takes the miracle of transferring an image onto paper as calmly as he takes a drink of water.

The research laboratories on the other hand are not so placed about photography. With the help of the electron microscope and other electronic devices, the basic nature of the photographic process is beginning to be understood. Some of the facts recently found are amazing.

On each square centimeter of surface of a photographic negative are *ten billion* tiny little grains of silver bromide, the common light-sensitive chemical. And each single grain of silver bromide is composed of ten billion pairs of silver and bromine atoms!

The tiny bullets of light, photons, they're called, strike the silver bromide atoms and decompose them into silver (in a colloid state) and bromine. This is the mysterious, hidden, latent image which does not appear until development with suitable other chemicals. It is the mechanics of this particular operation which scientists are probing. There is so little energy in a single light-quanta, that it is hard to understand how the chemical decomposition can take place—but it does!

The importance of this research has a direct bearing on the future. Vast quantities of film are needed and even larger amounts will be needed. The problem is to simplify the relatively complex procedure used today. And as soon as the mysteries of the latent image are solved we can expect some miracles in conventional photography—easy three dimensional, solid effects for example...

★ ★ ★

THE MATHEMATICAL UPROAR

By LEO BRADY

IF ANY subject can be described by the word "placid" it should be that of mathematics. Apparently this eternal and most honest of all searches after truth goes on its way undisturbed by wars or revolutions. Mathematics is a calm stream, drifting smoothly and calmly down the centuries.

Oh yeah!

Mathematicians can get as hot under the collar as the next man—and often they're a food deal more vociferous about it. The lively controversies of the inventors of the calculus, Leibnitz and Newton, the bitter disputes of Gauss, contemporaries, are now more or less a thing of the past. People don't get excited over these matters—at least not angrily.

But the matter of priority of discovery seems to be just as controversial as ever. While we haven't heard of the Russians yet claiming that they've invented analytic geometry or the calculus, we expect it any day.

That mathematical issues of this sort aren't dead yet, is amply demonstrated by an announcement from Arabian Nights' Baghdad. Archaeologists and historians, rummaging in the ruins of the ancient Sumerian cities have stumbled on what they regard as the historical find of the century.

They claim to have discovered clay tablets on which are engraved with styli and backed—symbols purporting to show that the antique Sumerians fifteen centuries before Euclid had written the basic theorems of geometry! This ancient peoples according to the tablets now in the hands of the Iraq government, anticipated Euclid's fundamental contributions to that rigorous mathematics we call geometry.

The discovery has stirred up the mathematical world. With more enthusiams than accuracy, the Iraqians have sent reproductions and translations of the tablets to the world's greatest mathematician—Albert Einstein. Unfortunately, contrary to popular opinion, Einstein is not a mathematician, but a mathematical physicist—a considerable difference.

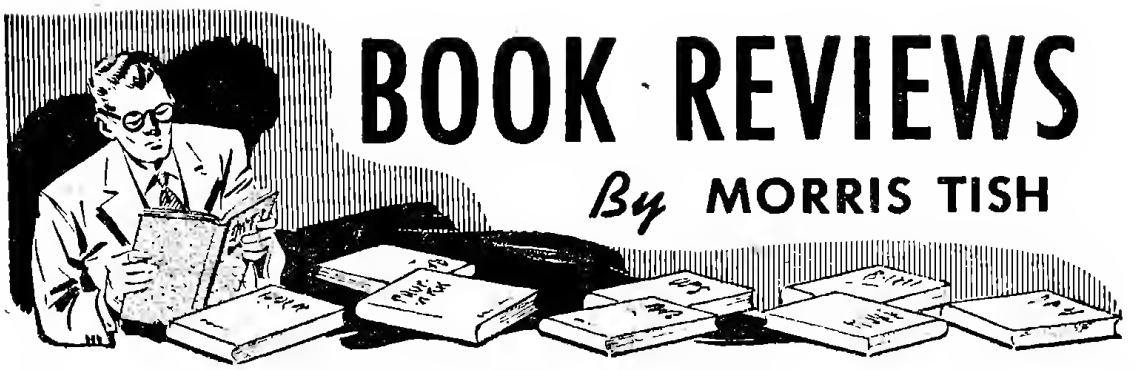
It will be interesting to hear Einsteins' reply which will most likely take the form of a polite note informing the authorities that the matter is being referred to suitable historians in the field.

In addition we are told that the Sumerians did a great amount of work in abstract algebra and other high and esoteric branches of mathematics. This is possible, but questionable. The symbolism of the time doesn't seem capable of handling the highly tenuous ideas inherent in the subject.

It is of course possible that the Sumerians have laid the foundations of geometry. If this is so, considerable revision of the estimate of ancient peoples' talents will have to be done.

As the Sumerians say, "parallel lines do not meet, no matter how far extended..."

★ ★ ★



BOOK REVIEWS

By MORRIS TISH

PEOPLE OF THE COMET

By AUSTIN HALL

(Griffin Pub. Co., Distributed By Fantasy Pub. Co., Los Angeles, Cal., 131 Pages $2.00)

PEOPLE OF THE COMET was first printed in 1924 as a novelette in "*Weird Tales*" magazine. For some strange reason, the Griffin concern has seen fit to resurrect this moth-eaten piece of literary fabric from the utter oblivion to which it had rightfully sunk. About the only point the publishers have proven is that science-fiction had advanced with maturity, and that this novelette creaks with the outmoded devices that even novice science-fiction writers have long since discarded.

A few brief comments should suffice concerning the meager plot, which deals with the adventures of one Alvas the Sansar, who comes from the earth's past, the dim long-gone era when only the North Pole was inhabitable, and who through adventuring in space, is thrown forward in time. He lands on a comet where he discovers an aged scientist, and—ho-hum—his beautiful daughter. He then falls in love with her and continues his explorations in her company. The whole point of his adventures is his discovery, long since trite to science-fiction readers, that the planetary systems are really the atoms of a larger universe. This same theme has been mined many times and more interestingly by Ray Cummings and others. This book is definitely *not* recommended.

THE TORCH

By JACK BECHDOLT

(Prime Press, Philadelphia, Pa., 229 Pages $2.50)

SOME OF the leading fantasy-specialist publishers, with the honorable exception of such houses as Gnome Press, Fantasy Press, and Shasta Publishers, seem to occasionally devote themselves to the task of reprinting stories which were published back in the early twenties. The results are not always happy. THE TORCH, like another mistaken effort THE PEOPLE OF THE COMET, shows all the signs of age, and unlike the great tales of H. G. Wells and A. Merritt which can stand reprinting, does not hold up well.

It is another tale which concerns civilization in a state of barbarism after the brief flame of atomic energy has flickered and gone out. (It would be very curious that this theme should have occupied Mr. Bechdolt's attention so long before atomic energy was discovered were it not for the fact that the book version has added the word "atomic" where pertinent to bring the original magazine version up-to-date.) The action takes place around the ruins that remain of New York. Life is brutal and savage, with the masses of people being exploited by the monarchs of the feudal society that exists. The hero is one Petty Captain Fortune, who is a member of this ruling class, and who abandons the opportunity to find power at the head of this society. He becomes involved with the revolutionary leaders who have as their symbol the Torch, now extinguished, of the Statue of Liberty. One of the leaders of this revolutionary group is the beautiful Mary of the Isle, for whose love he abandons all thoughts of self-aggrandizement and becomes converted to the ideals of Democracy. The revolutionists succeed in overthrowing the corrupt government by virtue of the rediscovery of secrets of warfare that have long been lost, and the novel ends with evil overthrown and justice prevailing in the person of young love triumphant. Sorry, not recommended.

* * *

DEATH'S DEPUTY

By L. RON HUBBARD

(Fantasy Pub. Co. Inc., Los Angeles, Cal., 167 Pages $2.50)

L. RON HUBBARD is one of the best-known authors in the field of fantasy and science-fiction and this relatively short novel strikes something of a compromise between both fields, being neither really one nor the other. Like most of the novels by better authors in science-fiction today, DEATH'S DEPUTY is distinguished for its excellent literary style. The basic concept with which it deals is a popular belief; the term "accident prone" is only a new name for what our fathers called "Jonah" or "jinx" and our grandfathers attributed to the machinations of "the evil eye".

Clayton McLean, the hero of this story, is a sensitive officer in the Canadian Air Corps, a man whose fate is to bring death to those around him, while he himself is miraculously spared. The novel deals with his successful attempt to find the ghastly truth about the mystery that surrounds him, and it ends—unlike the pulp thriller that deals with such themes—with a tragic and ironic solution, and one which it would hardly be fair to divulge.

The action moves at an absorbingly rapid rate; there is no padding of incident or description, and the characterization of McLean and his wife Laura is fully three-dimensional. In short, this is L. Ron Hubbard at his very best, and what reader could ask for more?

THE THIRTY-FIRST OF FEBRUARY

By NELSON BOND

(Gnome Press, New York, N. Y., 272 Pages $3.00)

THE THIRTY-FIRST OF FEBRUARY is a book which contains, to quote the blurb of the publishers, thirteen flights of fantasy. Like the preceding book by this author, the deservingly successful MR. MERGENTHWIRKER'S LOBBLIES, THE THIRTY-FIRST OF FEBRUARY deals with some vastly diverse and intriguing characters: a man who can walk through mirrors; a ghost who is afraid of mortals; a visitor from a generation not yet born; an enchanted pencil which enables its possessor to write masterpieces; and a creature of the fourth-dimension.

Unfortunately, not all of the stories are good ones. The first tale, *The Sportsman*, is not only devoid of any science-fiction or fantasy content, but what is far worse, is as saccharine and sticky a sentimental piece of tripe as we have read in a long time. All it needs is a Hollywood fanfare to make the atmosphere of a woman's mass-circulation magazine complete. Another story, *The Grapes of Wraith*, is as heavy-handed as the laborious pun in the title would indicate, and one or two other yarns are, to say the least, not distinguished.

Despite these strictures, the book as a whole is still worthwhile since it contains two of the neatest short stories we've read in the past few years. *The Cunning of the Beast* is an extremely ingenious retelling of the story of Genesis, and is exceeded for quality only by *The Five Lives of Robert Jordan*. This latter is an extremely deft and provocative application of Nietzsche's theory of predestination and eternal recurrence. Unlike most works of this sort, the philosophy is made implicit rather than given a heavy-handed, indigestible treatment through which the reader has to plow in order to finish the story.

Two other stories deserve comment. It is obvious that Bond has been greatly influenced by Stephen Vincent Benet, whose great fame as a poet has obscured the fact that he is the author of many great fantasies. *Take My Drum to England* handles the return of the legendary hero in time of his country's need: a Benet theme, Bond's character is Sir Francis Drake. A more successful story (very reminiscent of Benet's *By the Waters of Babylon*) is *Pilgrimage*, which deals with the America that has survived a world cataclysm. This theme has been handled poorly by many authors, but Bond has drawn very successfully the picture of a matriarchal society which worships the strange gods Jarg, Ibrim, Taamuz. Gustav Borglum's mountain-side sculptures survive from our time, and have an influence on future generations that he never conceived.

One last remark should be made. On the whole, the better stories in THE THIRTY-FIRST OF FEBRUARY are certainly worth reading. But whether these few good stories make this book a necessary addition to your library is strictly a touch-and-go proposition as far as we're concerned.

* * *

The Reader's FORUM



THE MONTH'S BEST LETTER

Dear Editor:

I wish you'd *read* this! It's not only a letter of criticism, it has some (I hope) workable how-to's.

In "The Reader's Forum", page 184, June AMAZING, answering a letter by Jim Bradley, you say, "Actually, were the stories of the good old days' really as good as nostalgia led us into believing?"

It's obvious you think not. And, you want to be ahead of the times, not behind. But what you're doing now isn't very ahead of the times, is it? You complain your own self, in your editorial, that you're stuck in the mud.

I agree that old stuff isn't as good as new stuff. But then, everything *is* old stuff. All it has is new angles. You can't repudiate old stuff entirely, can you? Then why not ask yourself if nostalgia is the only thing that makes readers hark back wistfully to the old stuff? There may be something you have overlooked. It's a sort of charm they had, that it would be perfectly easy to attain now, with new stuff, if you'd only get wise.

Take Adam Link. Why do you imagine the readers were so crazy about him? It isn't nostalgia alone. Adam was like the characters in the Oz books, or in Tarzan. He was a character, not a two-fisted hero who, in spite of terrific obstacles, battled his way to inevitable success, following all the stereotyped patterns.

Adam Link had a body. It was unusual and fascinating to read about how he operated and why. It made his motives interesting, and gave a filip to anything human he thought or did. Also, he had weaknesses, like vanity, hurt feelings, doubt, depair, etc. And he had unusual powers.

Remember the Oz robot, Tik Tok? He had clockworks inside and had to be oiled and wound up. The Scarecrow was so light the wind would blow him away, he was restuffed with hay now and then, he was afraid of fire, and his brains were poured into his head and then his head was sewed up. Tarzan had phenomenal strength and strange motives. He also had at one time a very interesting pet, a golden lion. He was *not* a two-fisted newspaper man, who said "guy" every time he referred to a man. Neither was he a hard-boiled detective who hung out in taverns, nor a rugged miner on an asteroid led astray in a waterfront dive by a web-footed Venusian dancer. Did you ever read that book about Mr. Wilmer, the ineffectual, henpecked little wage slave, and how he talked with horses? I've read it four times, but I wouldn't read any current AMAZING more than once. Would you?

Take Shaver. Just because in many ways his stuff was objectionable, you've utterly repudiated everything he was concerned with. But it wasn't only the bad stuff about him that the readers were enthralled with. For instance, he wrote about giantesses, about marvelous machines, and he described gorgeous settings which were like dreams of Utopia. He wrote about things people long for; which is why "Lost Horizon" was a hit... Shangri La was in it. The plot was mediocre, the setting was not, and neither was Shangri La.

Don't you think it would be nice if sometimes your characters were more like people are, just only a little bit? Can't they do something beside go through the exact motions that their type is supposed to go through? How about having a hero, sometime, who is partly a bad egg? Or a villain who isn't a complete skunk? I know things like this are apt to violate editorial taboos and deprive stories of punch. It is far easier to make them true to type. But why don't you demand a little skill of your writers, eh? Tell them to do something like that and cudgel their brains to make the story plausible and sharp, just the same. It *can* be done, by a writer who isn't lazy.

And the hackneyed old objects and places you use in stories! I'm *so* tired of them. Can't there be a story, once, about...an elephant, a kitchen stove, a cellar workshop, a grandfather clock, a black sheep whose wool turned white, an aborigine, an alchemist, a caliph, a baby, an old lady soak from Skid Row? Or is that asking too much? Would the writers have to *work too hard*? Why is it always labora-

tories, gangsters, the military, asteroids, cops, newspaper offices, taverns, Mars, penthouses, hovels? Other places do exist in this world. For instance, these exist: picnics, bingo games, waterfalls, spelling-bees, garages, hill-billy shacks, deserts, maple sugar-makings. But, I suppose if there were a story in a desert, it would be all guns, Foreign Legion and irate Arabs. But could a pixy live in a desert, or an intelligent lizard or serpent, or could one find a strange artifact there? Nope. I suppose not. It would have to be all weapons.

The women in AMAZING are positively nauseating. They're all so female-y. Can't one of them be a good-looking woman and an individual at the same time? Or does she have to go to extremes and be either a virago or a brainless blonde doll? I don't mind a bit how sexy they are, only I do wistfully wish that once in a while they would have some other little human thing about them. Even Li'l Abner's father has a weakness for stealing preserved turnips. And Moonbeam McSwine never takes a bath. Sigh. But AMAZING women are *all clothing store dummies*. I can't think why you even put the women in at all. Unless it's so that the hero can slaver after 'em. But does that have to be all?

Why don't you have a woman who is a raving beauty but too fat, just once? Or, she could be a shoplifter, or slightly catty, or have to shave off her moustache in secret every morning. Something...any old thing. It would be such a relief. Just to be different, why not have an opinionated girl with a beautiful, wise mother? It would be so human. It could be woven into a story in which the hero was the dominant character, and he could teach her a needed lesson; and mother could do something or other to a secondary character...probably marry him. They don't all have to be 21, do they? You can be more modern than the year 2,000, for all of me. But can't modernity still have those little things that make the story? For instance, in "Alice", there's a caterpillar that talks and smokes a hookah. AMAZING readers aren't as dumb as you think. They like something beside fisticuffs and constant action. AMAZING readers are better read than readers of other pulp mags, and sometimes they like a man to be a man, not a guy, and a thing to merely have a beginning, not a "kickoff".

There are lots of things in the world besides Russians, top brass, rockets, fission, and mechanical brains. Use them, but why should they dominate everything else? Hound dogs, statues of Buddha, spinsters, schoolrooms, swans, bowling balls and apiaries also exist. Why do you just moan about what your writers send you? Why don't you *tell* them?

Mrs. Richard Phillips
211 South 26th Street
South Bend 17, Indiana

We don't want to say "from the mouths of babes" because Mrs. Phillips would probably tear our head off. But it is surprising to find somebody, who obviously does not write fiction, saying the very things we've been saying to members of the writing fraternity for years.—HB

FROM OVERSEAS....

Dear Mr. Browne:

First, let me congratulate you on improving a magazine which I didn't think could be improved.

Second, I would like to appeal to American fans to write me. I promise all letters will be answered promptly. I would like to arrange a two-way lease-lend S-F mag swap with any fan who will contact me, i.e., British mags for American.

Wishing AS and American fans all the best.

E. Bentcliffe
47 Alldis Street
Woodsmoor
Stockport
Cheshire, England

Sir:

Somehow or other, no one knows how, an old copy of your magazine FA and its sister mag AS found their way into our ranks. After reading them both, I am ashamed of myself for wasting a few years in not reading them. Two stories in particular stick in my mind. "The Court of Kubla Khan" was terrific and "The Spirit of the Keys", masterly. Wish I could read more like them. The trouble is, they are hard to get. I wonder if any of your fans could help us. Quite a few of us here liked the SFF magazines. Do your best for a group of starving souls, please?

John L. Cook
21127955 Sqmn.
H.Q. Squadron, M Troop
40 Inf. Div. Sigs. Regt.
B.A.P.O. No. 1
Hong Kong

Dear Sirs:

I have never written to a magazine before, and I must tell you that AMAZING STORIES is the best science fiction (and fact) I have encountered.

However, there is something which you must know: no American magazines are coming here to Malta and so I need your generous help to print this letter in your discussion—then perhaps some other fan

could help me by exchanging AS with the WIDE WORLD English magazine for men (true stories). It costs 1/6d which is about equal to your 25c and I think it makes a fair exchange. So is anyone interested in my barter scheme? If so, write to me at once—I am very much AS starved, for I haven't seen one for 2½ years!

Even old copies will do as it will help me to get up-to-date with the famous "Shaver mystery".

I am depending on you to help me, and thank you very much.

Mr. F. Grech
72 Viani Street
Slicma
Malta, Europe

DON'T MISS THE NORWESCON!

Dear Mr. Browne:

Will you please print in your column this letter which I believe will be of interest to many of your other readers?

Most of the fans know that the Eighth World Science Fiction will be held in Portland, Oregon, Labor Day weekend. To those who have attended a convention, nothing more need be said.

To those who have not yet attended a convention, I would like to take this opportunity to give you a few reasons why you should come. It is THE fan event of the year, the one some fans travel thousands of miles to attend. It offers the fans an opportunity to add to his own collection, or sell from it.

It would not be possible to have a convention without speeches. And there will be speeches on subjects of interest by some of the most well-known pros and fans. An opportunity will be provided for those interested to take some active part.

Probably the best thing about the whole convention is the chance to meet and talk to your favorite author or you may remember it afterward by the new friends you make; friends who think as you do about science fiction and fantasy.

Send that buck now to NORWESCON, Box 8517, Portland, Oregon.

Juanita Sharp
NORWESCON
Box 8517
Portland 7, Oregon

With the strides science-fiction has made in the last twelve months, this year's World Convention in Portland, Ore., appears to be the most important in the field's history. We hope to be there ourselves—mainly to give the convention an oral report on the new AMAZING, *and to ask for suggestions for it from those best qualified to give suggestions: readers of science fiction.* —*Ed.*

"...OF CABBAGES AND KINGS"

Dear Mr. Browne:

It seems to me that your magazines would be improved if you left out those short features entirely. The form you have instigated is an improvement over the previous type, but their reading interest still is not great enough to take the place of a slightly lengthened story.

Another definite improvement you could make is to be more accurate in the fields of psychology and pyschiatry. Mental illness, personality disorders, emotional upsets, etc., are constantly referred to as crazy, nutty, lunatic, madness, etc. These terms are as inaccurate and as much a part of our past superstition as calling leprosy unclean, thinking of syphilis as only a skin disease, or thinking of a mental aberrant as being possessed with devils. Insanity is a very good legal term, but it is very vague when used synonymously with mental disease. Since only the courts can rule on insanity, no one else can decide whether he or someone else is insane. Many people have a mental disorder without being declared insane, and some few others are declared insane without having a mental disorder or psychosis.

Undoubtedly Rocky Stone is an expert on the subject of the great pyramid, but he shows an abysmal ignorance on the subjects of psychiatry and psychology; e.g., an I.Q. is the ratio of the mental age and the chronological age, but I wonder how a "C.Q." is obtained. Around a century ago all mental patients were chained in some asylum and the prognosis was nil. Today after these two sciences have grown up, as examples of progress, the prognosis for schizophrenia is 40-60% for recovery and the prognosis for manic-depressive is 80-90% for recovery. Those are fairly good results for sciences that are "at least 90% hokum". One might look at the results obtained by these in the military services during the war as well as the results being obtained at present in mental hospitals, clinics, industry, aviation, etc. as other examples of what psychiatrists and psychologists can accomplish. I dare say that Stone did not even know that psychology is broken down into many specialized fields. He had better try to analyze his own science of the pyramid with scientific methods before judging some other fields of which he knows nothing.

On page 139 of May AMAZING, a man is diagnosed as schizophrenic, catatonic,

and neurasthenic in about equal parts. If he were catatonic, he would naturally be schizophrenic since catatonia is one of the major subclasses of schizophrenia. If he were schizophrenic, he could not be neurasthenic since the former is a psychosis, and the latter is a neurosis and a psychosis is a much more severe personality disintegration. His syndrome sounds more like a fugue state than anything else. Vance had a clever story otherwise why could he not get those technicalities correct? If a psychiatrist treated a patient in any such manner, he would be kicked out of the profession in short order.

As to your editorial about the dearth of original stories, it would seem to me that a good writer could derive many new plots on the subjects of man's mind, emotions, and personality. This has hardly been touched in science fiction. Some stories have been based on Dr. Rhine's experiments (which have not proved anything so far) and on the fact that psychoanalysis deals with (among many other things) the id, ego, and super ego. That leaves an entire field as enthralling as atomics almost untouched. A writer could obtain a good reference book to make sure his technical material was correct and with a book or two of dynamics should be able to get many good ideas.

Perhaps M. D. Paley does not realize that sex is one of our major life drives both physiologically and psychologically whether it is completely repressed or given normal outlet in life and marriage. At least he did not indicate it in his letter. This is another subject that science fiction has not depicted in its true perspective, and I do not mean pornography. We would be as erroneous in assuming that sex would not play an important part in life 4000 years hence as the ancient Greeks would have been if they had said we would have no sex in our life.

Your covers could not rightly be described as sexy, but merely lurid. They could be improved if they had some individuality and distinction. As they are now, one could be exchanged for another and it would be hard to tell the difference.

I hope you will continue to improve the two magazines as you have started to do.

J. Wollett

MOTHER KNOWS BEST

Dear Ed:

Guess this will never see print, but that's unimportant if you will only read this.

I am a wife, age 26, and mother of two children, 8 and 6. My beef with AS and FA is the cover!

Now the female form is lovely to look at...at least the idealized drawings are. But do you have to have them blazing out so exaggeratedly?

I can always hide the cover from public sight while bringing them home, but since the children are older, I can't hide it from them. Altho the comic books are almost as bad, can't you fix the cover so one won't have to be ashamed to be caught reading such a trashy book?

After all, the book should sell by its wonderful stories. Since you have taken over, the inner mag is 100% improved. Now try the outside!

ASTOUNDING SF gets by quite nicely with space ships and such to sell their mag. Or is it that your artist can't draw anything but an oversexed semi-nude female. You can buy that stuff under most corner drugstore counters.

I'm sure if you'd dare to put it to a vote, true sf fans would rather have good stories and less fancy art work that makes them ashamed to be caught with a copy of AS or FA and ridiculed over reading trash. Any mother might like to read sf but refuse to have such covers at home.

Science fiction slowly but surely is climbing up the scale of literature. Why hold it back. Change the cheap shoddy art covers and help give sf a boost upward.

I guess some men will think I'm a frustrated old foggy. But really, if it's sex art they want, let them buy French postcards. Give us science fiction we don't have to HIDE from friends and relations. Good luck!

Mrs. Inez Neuman
1602 Rickenback Rd.
Baltimore 21, Md.

Your dare is taken. Votes will be counted and the results given.—Ed.

THE ANCIENT GEOMETRICAL ETC.

Dear Sir:

While I am as open-minded as the next man, and while I believe in giving a fair hearing to any idea, no matter how absurd, the recent series of articles in your magazine, "The Ancient Geometrical Monument" by one Rocky Stone is just a little too much for me.

Of this series, I have read the first two articles and the fifth but I found when I laid down the last one I had not missed a single thing by not reading the intervening numbers.

Mr. Stone's unceasing use of trite generalities have convinced me that he does

not know what he is talking about. He has the most finely developed talent of talking much and saying little of any writer or so-called writer I have ever read.

If that were not enough, the basis of his whole argument would be the clincher. He rests his whole proposition on the assumption that the four sides of the great pyramid do not join at a common vertex, but rather that they stop short of it forming a polygon at the tip.

Unfortunately for the worthy Mr. Stone such is not the case. The four sides of the great pyramid did join at a common vertex until an Egyptian caliph attempted to dismantle it and removed quite a few feet of stone from the tip as well as the casing.

Now, I could cite quite a few authorities on this point, but I won't. Instead, I'll point out the fact that the second pyramid at Gizah still has its tip and the sides of the tip meet in a common vertex. The three pyramids at Gizah were all built from a common design.

If Mr. Stone had really wanted to put his theories on a concrete basis why didn't he use the Maya pyramids of Central America to base his theories.

Finally, Mr. Stone offers no proof, no clinching evidence, can cite no authorities to base his contentions. In the three articles which I have read so far, each and every one of the "astounding scientific revelations" Mr. Stone has promised to reveal have turned out to be just so much hot air.

As one more added thought, let me ask Mr. Stone this question. If these "mental giants" living in ancient Egypt knew of all the scientific wonders which were to come, why didn't they go ahead and invent them themselves?

I would like to know what Mr. Stone has to say on this last point and let's not have any rubbish about people not being sufficiently developed.

Andrew Engebretson
Lowry, Minn.

VIRGINIA FANS PLEASE NOTE

Dear Editor:

For the past three months I have been attempting to organize a STFan Club here on the Virgina Penninsula. So far, my efforts have produced negligible results. As a last resort, which perhaps should have been first, I have decided to try advertising in the prozines. So, I would appreciate it very much if you would print this letter in your reader's column.

If there exist any STFan in the Newport News, Hampton, Phoebus area who are interested in organizing such a club, would you please contact

C. Ray Bryan
305 N. 2nd Street
Buckroe Beach, Va.

★ ★ ★

THE NTH MILLENIUM

By WALTER LATHROP

NEW STATIA was extremely conscious of its duty to its citizens and to this end it saw that they were fed, housed, amused, and worked— "from each, according to his means, to each, according to his needs." And everything worked without friction, smoothly and purposefully, toward whatever destiny such states move.

And so it was with considerable perturbment that in the vast archive-offices of the Greater State of New Statia, Controller Seven, a grim-faced, diligent conscientious public servant, heard his flat-chested, secretary announce with something like awe in her voice that a worker, one "Z-Four-Oh", from the production Section wished an audience with him. Never in all his thirty years of experience had any such thing happened. Workers never had cause to see anyone. They were too well taken care of.

As the timid figure of Z-Four-Oh entered the strictly functional offices, Controller Seven's mind raced furiously anticipating the cause for this impossible visit. It couldn't be the food, or the amusement, or the housing. No they were too perfect. What then, might be Z-Four-Oh's concern? Sickness? No, there was New Statia's Medicine to care for that.

Z-Four-Oh was unimpressive by any standards. Clad in his crude but comfortable work-clothing, baggy and shapeless, the mousy little man stepped nervously to the Controller's desk.

"Sir," he said in a squeaky voice, tensed by hesitant fear, "I wish to change my work-job. I am now a machine-operator."

Controller Seven's mouth dropped open. He snapped it shut like a steel trap when he recovered his aplomb. He pointed to the sheaf of papers on his desk.

"You must be ill," he said, still astonished at this temerity, "the records show you are most eminently suited for your position."

"I do not like my position, sir," the nervous little man said forcing his heart to still its wild-beating. "The machines made an error. I am not a good machinist."

"Your record is perfect," stated the Controller. "Surely the Machine cannot be wrong. I will send you back to work—say, —what did you *think* you were suited for?" Even as he asked the question the Controller felt abashed that he'd been carried away by such idle curiosity. Z-Four-Oh was a machine operator, had been a machine-operator and so far as he, Controller Seven, was concerned, would always be a machine-operator.

But Z-Four-Oh replied, and this time not at all quaveringly.

"I am a poet," he announced.

"A what?" the Controller demanded, racing his mind for the definition.

"I write poetry," said Z-Four-Oh, "The stars are bright, and in the night..."

"—Stop!" thundered the Controller. "You are mouthing gibberish. Report at once to the Mediks. They'll—"

Shrieking furiously, the mousy little man in complete revolt, hurled himself angrily at the Controller. "You fool, fool, fool!" He mouthed imprecations and attempted to assault the majestic person of the Controller. But the staff-workers in the office tore him away.

They dragged the shouting rebel away to the Euthan chambers, while Controller Seven sat stock still at his desk and contemplated the weird state of affairs. "A poet," he said half to himself, turning the words over in his mouth, "a poet, a man who puts words together." His brow wrinkled: Of what use is that to the State. He tried to understand. He shook his head.

And the words drummed constantly through his mind, "The stars are bright, and in the night...the stars are bright and... bright...night...bright...night."

When Controller Seven was also consigned a few days later to the Euthan chambers, the vast and mighty structure of New Statia suffered the first crack in its impregnable armor.

The guards heard the Controller shouting the strange but pleasing words, and...

"The stars are bright, and in the night..."

ICY COLD-WAR

by JUNE LURIE

EVEN THOUGH this is an air-age, devoted to jets and rockets, still the bulk of the world's heavy commerce goes over the cold North Atlantic sea-lanes. Huge passenger ships and freighters plow the great-circle routes over the North Atlantic, taking advantage of the shorter distance as compared with straight East-West sailing.

But the North Atlantic is a treacherous dangerous stretch of sea, abounding as it does in icebergs, which seem to be increasing in size and numbers in recent years. Against these mountainous hulks of solid ice, science has brought every weapon in its lavish arsenal; the weapons so far that work are simple and can be summarized in one word—watchfulness!

Patrolling the grim lonely northern ocean are the ships of a dozen nations, their radios humming out continual warnings of the location of the subtle monsters, the icebergs. These vast structures of ice, seven-eight submerged, disdainfully regard the efforts of man, and ponderously go their majestic ways, unharmed by any attacks man can make against them.

The combination of these floating icy mountains, hidden in fog, and drifting rapidly with the Atlantic currents, can cause terrible loss of property and life. Ever since the terrible *Titanic* disaster ways have been sought to track the floating skyscrapers. At present there are only two really effective tools in the scientific arsenal—radio and radar. The former continually reports the location of known bergs—the latter finds them. In addition, ships equipped with radar can stay clear of the knife-edged bergs.

At present a lot of people would pay a lot of money if there was found some simple way to destroy the gigantic icebergs when they drift into the sea-lanes from the northern latitudes. So far the most powerful explosives are useless against millions of tons of submerged ice. Possibly the atomic bomb might be used with some success, but there is ever present the deadliness of radioactivity.

The icy-cold war might be conceivably won by some ingenious chemical invention which would induce ice to melt rapidly—but that seems impossible. Perhaps some way of shattering the icy giants with super-sonics might be the answer.

The battle goes on and for the time being we are holding our own, but the iceberg patrol dare never cease. Now the hope of defeating the frigid monsters lies in the hands of the meteorologists. Someday man will control the weather—and that will end the iceberg menace.



The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

Conducted by ROG PHILLIPS

AMAZING STORIES is going high hat. Yes sir! Howard Browne said to me just yesterday, "Rog," he said, "you're going to have to write a lot better if you hope to get your stuff in the new *Amazing*." I nodded glumly and let him pour me another drink of his—uh—coffee. "Yesss," Howard said, hissing sinisterly, "you're going to have to compete with guys like Heinlein, Van Vogt, Ray Blad—Lay Bralbur—well, you know who I mean—well, you're just going to have to, thash all, ol' pal, ol' pal."

I drank two more tall glasses of coffee spiked with generous amounts of Kentucky mare's milk, thoughtfully.

Then I said, "Yes, I guess you're right, Howard."

"Sure I'm right," he said. "What did I say?"

"Happy birthday," I answered.

"Ish your birshday?" he exclaimed happily. Then his mind slipped into gear again. His grin was sinister. "Enjoy yourshelf, kid. Maybe next year you'll be broke."

"It's *your* birthday," I corrected.

"Oh," he said blankly. "Then maybe *I'll* be broke. Got to be careful." He took my drink away from me and started pouring it back in the bot—silex very carefully.

"You will if you don't succeed with the new *Amazing*," I said.

"Will what?" he asked, pausing in his pouring.

"Be broke," I said. "That is, unless you get a good author in it."

"In what?" he asked blankly.

"The new *Amazing*," I said.

"Who?" he asked.

"Rog Phillips," I suggested.

"Who's he?" Howard asked blankly.

"Haven't you heard of him?" I asked incredulously. "He had a couple pocket novels not long ago, a short in TWS a couple years ago, a story in *F. B. I. Detective* recently, an article in *Author and Journalist* coming up—"

"Say no more," Howard said gravely.

"You mean you want him to write for you?" I asked happily.

"No!" Howard said.

So that's the way it stands. I'm going to have to use psychology to get into the new *Amazing*. Deluge Howard with telegrams saying, "WE WANT ROG IN THE NEW AMAZING STOP." Meanwhile I'll put on an old worn out suit and leave my diamond-studded solid-gold wristwatch home, and stagger into Ziff-Davis with a haggard look when I take down a manuscript. I'll drop out to his house for dinner and claim I'm broke and hungry. If that doesn't break him down, well, I guess I'll have to start sending my stuff to the New York markets.

Craig Browning will be on the stands soon with a Century Pocket Novel titled "World of If". George O. Smith is coming up with one too, so I hear. Then maybe Rog Phillips again.

The NORWESCON progress report is first on the list of fanzines this months. As most of you know, every year a WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION is held at some city decided on at the previous year's convention. This is the eighth one. It's being held in Portland, Oregon, at the American Legion Hall on Labor Day weekend, September 1st through the 4th. That's Friday through Monday.

So far there are a hundred and forty-five signed up. There will probably be a lot more. If you're planning on being there, send Ruth Newberry, Norwescon Treasurer, one dollar NOW. And if you can't be there, send her a dollar anyway, to support fandom in this. It's going to cost something, and is already, with all the planning and correspondence involved.

If you live near Chicago or east of Chicago contact Bob Tucker, Box 260, Bloomington Illinois, about plans for going. He's organizing a group to travel together via Pullman on a vacation trip through Los Angeles and up to Portland, then back over the northern route to Chicago.

As long as he's doing that, I'll stick my neck out and appoint him a travel committee of one for other methods of transportation. If you're planning on driving, and can use, say, three passengers, send Bob a short note to that effect, enclosing three self-addressed stamped envelopes. If you want a ride, send Bob one self-addressed stamped envelope. Then all he has to do is stick yours in the envelope of the one with the car and drop

it in the mailbox, without having to waste time writing anything. That way drivers and passengers can get together.

So far as I know I'll attend the convention myself. So unless something comes up to keep me away I'll be seeing you there.

Now to the fanzines. There's a nice crop of them this time. As a matter of fact, there always is. Fandom is more than just a bunch of people of all ages who like to read science fiction. It is a group of alive, interested and interesting people, who like to do things. Most of them at one time or another try their hand at publishing a fanzine. Some of them, like James. V. Taurasi, and Art Rapp and several others, keep on publishing their zine year after year, making a fascinating hobby of it. Some graduate into the prozines as authors and editors. A few even become real scientists with collitch degrees and white laboratory gowns and nice salaries.

But all of them have been captured by the romance of science and the possibilities inherent in what we know about this universe of reality.

In the prozines like *Amazing Stories* you get stories written by professional writers —men who write well enough to sell what they write. I've found during the past two or three years that the amateurs have ideas just as good and in some cases better. Often the writing style isn't professional, but the thing is that in the fanzines these budding writers get their efforts printed, and find an audience, whether their work is stories, articles, letters, poems, or fantasy art. There's a spontaneity in the fanzines that can't be had in a prozine. And there are potential friends waiting for you to find them through the pages of the fanzines. So subscribe to one or two when you get through reading these reviews of current issues, and join in on it.

FANTASY-TIMES: bi-weekly; 10c, 12/$1; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing, New York. We have three issues of *Fantasy-Times* on hand at present. The 2nd February issue is a special, extra-large edition—it marks the 100th edition of *Fantasy-Times* and is well worth the 20c price. There are 28 pages of the latest fan-news, the regular F-T columns and guest articles by such notables as Dr. Keller, Ray Palmer, Mary Gnaedinger, Bob Tucker, and others. One of the many special features of this 100th Anniversary Issue is the full-color reproduction of the cover of LOS CUENTOS FANTASTICOS, the South of the Border stf-zine. Don't miss this issue, you'll want to keep it as one of the mile-stones of fanzine history.

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The death of Edgar Rice Burroughs is the feature story of the 1st March issue of F-T, as reported by Taurasi. In addition you'll find a writeup of Hugo Gernsback's speech at the ESFA meeting, an article on the forthcoming film ROCKETSHIP X-M by Ackerman, telling of his visit to the set while the movie was being filmed.

The cover alone on the 2nd March *Fantasy-Times* is worth the 10c cost of the zine. It's a photograph of Forrest J. Ackerman and Osa Massen, star of ROCKETSHIP X-M, taken while Forry was visiting the set, as reported in the previous issue of F-T. On the inside you'll find up-to-the-minute news of fandom, the latest information on the prozines, and articles of interest by F-T's competent staff of reporters. For complete coverage of stf happenings, you can't go wrong if you subscribe to *Fantasy-Times*.

SPACEWARP: monthly; 15c, 9/$1 or 10/$1 if you belong to the NFFF; Art Rapp, 2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan. Volume VII No. I gets off to a good start with a cover by Ralph Fluette and interior artwork by Bill Rotsler and Bill Venable. One of the most interesting features was, as usual, Art's editorial which covers three pages in this issue. He let off a little steam in this *Timber* which is appropriately subtitled *Laneyesque Lispings, Languidly Listed.* Laney himself, in his column *Fanzine Scope,* deviated slightly from his usual "tear into 'em and rip 'em to shreds" technique; in fact, he seemed almost mellow and indulgent. Bill Venable's *Manual of Fan Education* is a boon to neo-fen who will discover there such bits of wisdom as "Redd Boggs recently escaped from jail. Somebody smuggled a copy of *Spacewarp* to him and he used File Thirteen." "H. Rider Haggard did not have a very good education; this is because he wrote a book called *She.* The correct title would be *Her*" and many other facts that are well-known to the old time fan. Send your money for a subscription to Art right now, as *Spacewarp* is one of the more dependable fanzines, featuring consistently good material.

* * *

THE X-RAY: monthly; 10c, 12/$1; Ronald Friedman, 1980 East 8th Street, Brooklyn 23, N. Y. X-Ray is the official organ of the Universal Musketeers, a fast-growing fan club. I have the first and second copies on hand for review, and the thing that impresses me most is the marked improvement shown. Vol. 1 No. 1 is 5 mimeoed pages, containing a list of the charter members, a story, an article, and the ballot for the election of officers. In Vol. 1 No. 2 the zine has tripled in size, with sixteen pages of fact and fiction. The overall appearance is much neater, and the mimeographing shows the result of the experience gained in publishing the first issue. The quality of the material itself has also improved, and if the zine gets better with each issue as Ron has predicted, the UM will have an official zine they can well be proud of. In fact, they already have!

* * *

FANFARE: bi-monthly; 15c, 6/65c; W. Paul Ganley, 118 Ward Road, N. Tonawanda, N.Y. A 20-page, hectographed zine containing fiction, articles and poetry. *Involuntary Odyssey,* by Andrew Duane, will appeal especially to the Burroughs fans, since it deals with Franklin Seller's adventures when he comes face to face with John Carter on the planet Barsoom—which just goes to prove that if you read stf and fantasy faithfully you'll feel at home anywhere in the universe. Additional fiction is provided by Mike Phillips, Toby Duane, Vance Corey and Al Leverentz. This is the second issue of *Fan-Fare,* and it promises to get better and better with each issue.

* * *

MEZRAB: quarterly; Marion & Robert Bradley, Box 298, Tahoka, Texas. This is the Vol. I No. I, and the publishers are not accepting subscriptions as yet; if you want the next issue of the zine just drop them a card requesting a copy. Since one half of the Bradleys favors fiction and the other half takes a firm stand for fact articles, you'll find both fact and fiction as well as some poetry in *Mezrab. The Ancient Blade,* by Thyril Ladd is well-written fantasy that will be welcomed by the fans who have been asking for good stories of greater length in fanzines. In *Meet Thyril Ladd,* Marion Bradley intro-

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duces you to the author, and gives you a few of the interesting facts about him. On the fact side of the ledger, Robert Bradley presents an interesting article *Home Spun Philosopher*, dealing with Laotzu's TAO TEH KING. *Mezrab* is a neatly put-together fanzine with good material, so why don't you drop the Bradley's a card asking for a copy of the next issue?

* * *

THE EXPLORER: bi-monthly; 10c, 50c/yr; Ed Noble, Jr., Girard, Penna. A neatly-mimeoed, 18-page legal size zine published by and for the I.S.F.C.C. You'll find a little bit of everything in the *Explorer;* poetry, fiction, articles and features. The features are really outstanding in interest, since they give information as to items (stf and otherwise) that various members have for sale, want to obtain, or are especially interested in. If you have books and mags to sell, or want to buy some you can probably find a fan who will buy them or can supply them in *Explorer*. Or if your hobby is gathering data to prove there's life on Mars, you'll probably find someone who has a similar interest by checking the hobbies of fans listed in the *Kollector's Korner*. Write to Ed Noble for information on receiving *The Explorer* and/or joining the I.S.F.C.C.

* * *

AD-O-ZINE: monthly; W. C. Butts, 2058 E. Atlantic Street, Philadelphia 34, Penna. You can receive a copy of this pocket-size zine by merely sending in a 2c stamp. Devoted entirely to ads, you'll find here lists of books, fanzines and prozines to buy, sell or trade. If you have some books to sell, or if you need some items to complete a collection you can take a full-page ad (4 x 6) for only 30c, or send a 2c stamp for a copy of the zine and see if some of the items you're looking for are available.

* * *

UTOPIAN: 25c; R. J. Banks, Jr., 111 S. 15th St., Corsicana, Texas. When the first issue of *Utopian* appeared several months ago, it was a one-man operation from beginning to end. With the second issue, Banks is again supplying most of the material, but he is ably assisted by Michael Varady and Alan M. Grant. Vol. I No. 2 is 30 pages, mimeographed, containing three stories (two by Banks, one by Varady), two articles (one by Banks and one by Grant) and several departments. Among the departments you'll find the *Stf-Fantasy Quiz Page* to test your knowledge of stfdom, and an interview carried on between Banks and myself via the mail, which you'll admit is not the easiest way to interview an author.

* * *

FANSCIENT: quarterly; 25c, 6/$1; Don Day, 3435 NE 38th Ave. Portland 13, Oregon. Don recently took a survey to determine if the fans wanted any changes

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in the size of the zine or the type used, and the results indicated that present zine size, type size and material used are just what the fans want. This is not surprising since Don put out one of the neatest fanzines published and uses high-quality material. In Vol. IV No. 1 there is an article on J. Allen St. John, complete with photos, by Darrell Richardson. Ted Sturgeon takes over the *Author, Author* column this time, and provides quite a bit of entertaining reading, and I'm sure Russ Manning's *Ishtar* illustration will rate the approval and admiration of all who see it.

* * *

SHIVERS: 10c; Andrew Macura, 230 Prince St., Bridgeport 8, Conn. published five times a year. The Spring issue contains several poems and stories and a true psychic experience article. Outstanding among the stories was Bob Johnson's clever yarn *Poltergeist in His Pants* reprinted from *Luna Magazine*, which deals with the problems of a young couple who find that they must share their home with a poltergeist. But with the housing shortage, what can you expect?

* * *

SCIENCE-FICTION NEWS LETTER: bi-monthly; Bob Tucker, P.O. Box 260, Bloomington; free for the asking, just send Bob a postcard requesting the next issue. This marks Bob's first edition under the new title of S-F News Letter, after fourteen issues of the Bloomington News Letter. Bob feels that the new title is more in keeping with the contents of the zine, and I think most readers will agree with him. S-F N.L. features advance news on prozines, books, fanzines and stf notables. A valuable addition to the *News Letter* is Bill Rotsler, who takes over as staff artist. Why don't you drop Bob a card asking for the next issue of "the leading newspaper of the science-fiction world"?

* * *

NEKROMANTIKON: quarterly; 25c. 4/$1; Manly Banister, 1905 Spruce Ave., Kansas City 1, Missouri. With a two-color cover and quite a few lino-block interior illustrations the first issue of *Nekromantikon* gets off to a good start. As for the contents, take your choice of fiction, articles and poetry—they're all there. With material frankly patterned after the style made famous by HPL and other exponents of the weird and macabre, the editor states that this is "a 'fanzine' in the sense that it is by and for fen. In style, it is going to be as professional as means and ability will make it." Judging from the quality of this issue and the presentation of its editor Banister has a more than fair chance of making good on that statement.

* * *

THE DETROIT STFAN: 5c, 6/25c; Edith Furcsick, 5037 Maplewood Avenue, Detroit 4, Michigan. This is the official organ of the Detroit Science Fantasy League, and consists mainly of reports of past meetings, announcements of future club activities and items of interest to club-members. Of general interest are articles on current events in stfdom and the *Fanography* department, which features a vignette of one of the DSFL members each issue. Fans in the Detroit area interested in joining the DSFL should contact Edith Furcsik, secretary of the organization.

* * *

VALHALLA: bi-monthly; Arniece Curley, Secretary, General Delivery, Oswego, Illinois; official organ of Young Fandom, distributed free to members. With the January 1950 issue Bill Rotsler takes over as editor of *Valhalla*, and starts things off right with a beautiful cover illustration and several interior illos. Outstanding feature of this issue is a series of character sketches of such notables as Malthor, Kibor, Finthan Forth Y Ranor, and Ran-KOR d'Glomosotu. You may have been unaware of the existence of these beings before, but after reading the No. 10 *Valhalla*, you won't fail to recognize them if you meet one or more of them at some fan gathering—take my word for it!

* * *

THE JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT and *The Rocket News Letter*: monthly; 25c, 10/$2.25; Wayne Proell, 10630 S. St. Louis Avenue, Chicago 43, Illinois. We have two issues on hand for review this time, the March and April 1950 numbers. With space flight apparently looming closer all the time, the March issue features two articles on the subject of space stations: "Use of the Space Station for Space Navigation" by L. J. Grant, Jr., and "The Proper Military Use of the Space Station" by Wayne Proell. The lead article in the April issue is by Norman Bowman, entitled "Nitrogen Dioxide Derivatives in Rocket Fuels". In line with the current interest in the flying saucers George Whittington discusses the subject in "What's True About the Disks". Fans interested in space-flight should write to George Whittington, 2641 W. Haddon Street, Chicago, Illinois for information about joining the Chicago Rocket Society or receiving their publications.

* * *

WONDER: Michael Tealby, 8 Burfield Avenue, Loughborough, Leicester, England; published every four months; one year's sub. in exchange for any issue of a fantasy prozine. The Spring 1950 issue of *Wonder* contains fiction and articles, the featured article being "The Great Flying Saucer Mystery" by Ron T. Deacon.

This issue of *Wonder* was accompanied by the following letter from the editor, Michael Tealby.

"Dear Mr. Phillips: Herewith the latest *Wonder* for the CLUB HOUSE review. I'm very grateful for the nice reviews you have been giving *Wonder*, as, through your reviews, I have contacted quite a few fans. Additions to *Wonder's* mailing list are entirely due to the CLUB HOUSE column, so once again, many thanks.

"I have read your two Matrix stories and these are stored in the bookcase together with the issues containing "The Despoilers", "Unthinkable", etc. I enjoyed all these very much, in fact, they go deeper than mere enjoyment; it gets one to thinking.

"It is, of course, obvious that all theories of scientists which try to give an explanation of the entire nature of the universe and of reality fall far short of perfection. A true picture would include an explanation of all unusual or 'supernatural' phenomena witnessed.

"At present, science, not being able to explain any 'outlandish' occurrence as it would upset present theories, decides to ignore all such phenomena and, whether they be strange objects in the sky, rains of frogs, or haunted houses, dismisses every paranormal event as hallucination, etc.

"I should imagine that Rhine's researches have made certain present scientific theories very unstable. Telepathy being dismissed, until recent years, as a 'music hall stunt'.

Ah, well...that's enough for now! Once again, many thanks and I hope you like this issue of *Wonder*. Sincerely, Michael Tealby."

* * *

I'm very glad, Michael, that the CLUB HOUSE has been of service to you in increasing your circle of friends and correspondents. After all, the real purpose of this department is to bring fans together and encourage their activities in every way possible.

ROG PHILLIPS

FACTS OF THE FUTURE

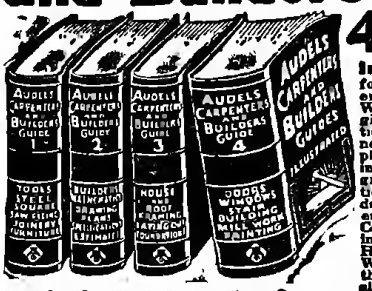
by LYNN STANDISH

DR. FARRELL'S FRANKENSTEIN

"I'M SORRY, honey," Bill Cronin said to the young girl on the church steps. "I hate this Sunday work, but you know Dr. Farrell."

"Yes," Gloria said, frowning, but resignedly, "he's always wanting you to work. I think sometimes he's taking advantage of you, Bill. He thinks he's a God with that

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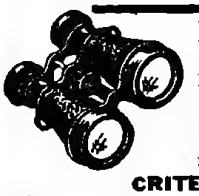


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nasty old calculating machine of his."

"Differential analyser, Gloria, remember?" Bill smiled. "I'll see you tonight about eight. O.K.?"

He kissed her lightly and then jumped into his car. He hadn't let Gloria see how angry he really was. Dr. Farrell was really taking advantage of him. Why the hell did he have to work *seven* days a week? Just because he'd selected computing machines for his doctoral thesis didn't mean he wanted to dedicate his life to them!

Bill went from the bright clear sunlight of the beautiful Sunday morning into the cavernous gloom of Lab II, harshly lighted by the pendant fluorescents.

"Good morning, Dr. Farrell," he said trying to keep the pique out of his voice.

"Oh there you are," the resonant tones came from Farrell, a tall heavy man, an authority on calculating machines and a proud science-dedicated man. "It's about time," he said brusquely. "I want to set up this Xi integral and get the machine rolling. I promised Fleming I'd have the results to him late this evening."

The next hour was spent in setting up the problem to the giant electro-mechanical brain. Bill looked at the machine, lying there so quiescent, yet so suggestive. It was only a maze of wires and relays, vacuum tubes and motors, but it seemed almost ominous.

The problem was soon set-up and the two scientists watched it go into action, a matter of clicking, buzzing sounds, almost overwhelmed by the roar of the cooling blowers.

Dr. Farrell lit a cigarette. "You don't have to go to church on Sunday when you're working on something like this, Cronin," he said abruptly.

Bill looked up surprised. "I don't follow you, Doctor," he said puzzled. Boy, Farrell is really feeling unusual today, he thought.

"When we are able to construct a thinking machine like this, Cronin, I think we've almost become gods!"

"I wouldn't go as far as to say that, sir," Bill disagreed. "It's a great machine, but it's a far cry from the human mind."

"True. True. But it is a step in the right direction—and it won't be many years before there are going to be some astounding developments in this field."

"I agree, sir, but that still doesn't make us gods."

Farrell turned and faced him. There was an intense frown on his face.

"Listen Cronin," he said fiercely, "I've built this machine. And as far as I'm concerned, it's as good as alive!" He fumbled with his cigarette, "Do you understand that?" he demanded.

You *are* cracking up, Bill said to himself. Brother, you better stop work on this monster before you lose your marbles.

Aloud he said, "Well, it's all the way

you look at it sir. To me—well—sometimes, I think that Man is making a Frankenstein monster which will someday destroy him."

Farrell didn't say anything and the rest of the day passed with little conversation and much work.

A red light winked on and off. "Shall I get it, Doctor?" Bill asked, "It's trouble in the input."

"No," Farrell said savagely, for no no reason at all. "I'll take it."

He started for the maze of small motors that drove the input shafts.

"Aren't you going to cut the switch, Doctor?" Bill asked, alarmed now.

For an answer, Farrell went into the power cubicle.

Suddenly there came an agonized scream from behind the thin sheet-metal wall. Like a flash, Bill cut the switches and the brain ground to a stop, with only the cooling blowers keeping up their hideous whine.

When Bill entered the cubicle he saw Farrell. The professor's arm was caught in a gear train. The sight sickened him for the flesh and bone were ground horribly. Bill's quick cutting off of the power saved the man, but the arm was gone forever.

Weakly Farrell rose to consciousness as Bill managed to free his mangled arm. "I'm sorry, Cronin," he said in a whisper, "I think you tagged it right. I swear the machine caught me." His face went white and he fainted again.

Frankenstein's monster, Bill thought; that's just what the thinking machines will be, Frankenstein's monster...

★ ★ ★

THE TIME-SHOPPER...

THE MAN the secretary ushered into Mel Blanding's office was not impressive—but he was unusual. He was oddly dressed, Mel noted instantly, archaically, as if he shopped for his clothes in a museum. His obviously false teeth fitted poorly and his bald head was grotesquely large for his small body.

He spoke in a high-pitched voice:

"Mr. Blanding?" he extended his hand with a little bow.

Mel extended his own. "Sit down, sir," he said. "Just how can we help you?"

"I should like to give you an order," the man said, "an order for what you call servomechanisms and electronic equipment."

"Fine," Mel said, the salesman in him coming to the fore. "If you'll present us with your specifications and some sample prints, we'll get into production for you within three weeks."

"Oh no!" the strange man objected, "you must start at once. I have the sketches here." He withdrew a sheaf of papers from an inside pocket. He smiled grimly. "My name is Shennon."

Mel frowned, "Well, Mr. Shennon, I don't know how we can possibly give your order precedence. We have certain commit-

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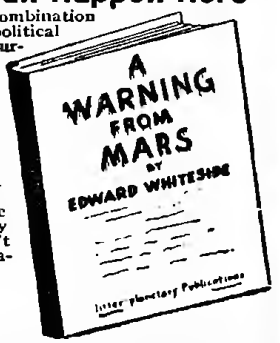
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ments you know."

In the next twenty minutes Mel found out how he was going to give Mr. Shennon's order preference. First the man showed him the sketches which were of an electronic nature employing small electric motors and servomechanisms with outlandish requirements. Despite Mel and his chief engineer's study of the sketches, they made no logical sense.

It was not difficult for Mel and his men to quickly present a cost analysis to Mr. Shennon. The figures came astoundingly high since, despite the simplicity of the device it employed very expensive components.

When the analysis had been made, Mr. Shennon calmly sat down and wrote a check for three quarters of the figure. "Here," he said "is a token of my good faith. I must have these equipments within three days. I will pay you the remainder at the end of that time. You will truck the apparatus to—" he named an obscure warehouse on the edge of the city.

When he had, giving no further explanations, Mel had a quick count taken on the check. "Yes, sir," the bank official said, "Mr. Shennon's account is more than adequate. We will immediately transfer the draft."

While the plant went into action and started high-speed production, Mel poured over the sketches, fascinated by their crudeness and mystery. No electrical device can be completely unintelligible, but this one was. Neither Mel nor his engineers could make sense of it. But since it had been payed for, they would produce it.

The order was completed and delivery was to be made that afternoon. An impossible impulse drove Mel to accompany the truckers to their destination. And when the goods had been stacked in the warehouse Mel crouched behind one of the pillars of the building and waited.

He waited an hour and then two. No one came. Just as he was dozing off, a high pitched voice at his side said:

"Curiosity, eh Mr. Blanding?" It was the strange Mr. Shennon. "I've deposited the remainder of the money," he added. "Isn't that sufficient?"

"Of course," Mel said sheepishly, "but frankly, my curiosity wouldn't let me alone. What is that—that—thing—for?"

The strange little Mr. Shennon seemed to take on stature. He didn't appear meek or odd. There was a cold dignity in his voice.

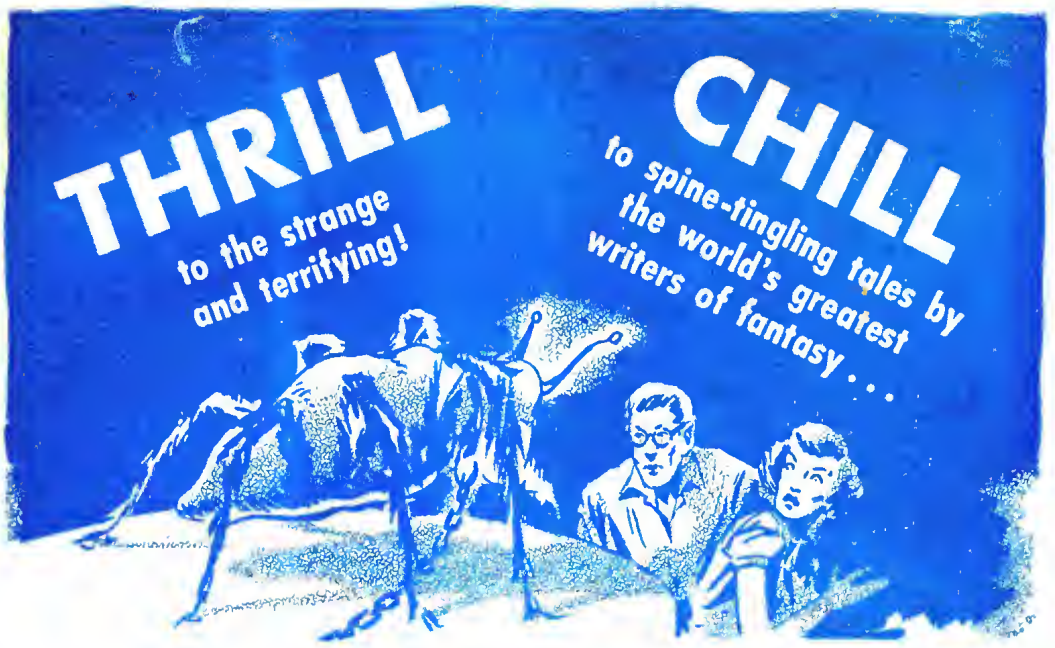
"I'm going to tell you the truth," he said, "though you won't believe it. You have supplied an essential part for a weapon. *I am from the thirty-first century.*"

Mel's start of astonishment ended before it began.

Everything seemed to fog into a haze, a shimmer of unreality, and Mr. Shennon's features quivered, then dissolved into nothingness like the Cheshire cat's grin.

Mel Blanding, two minutes later, was standing in an empty warehouse...

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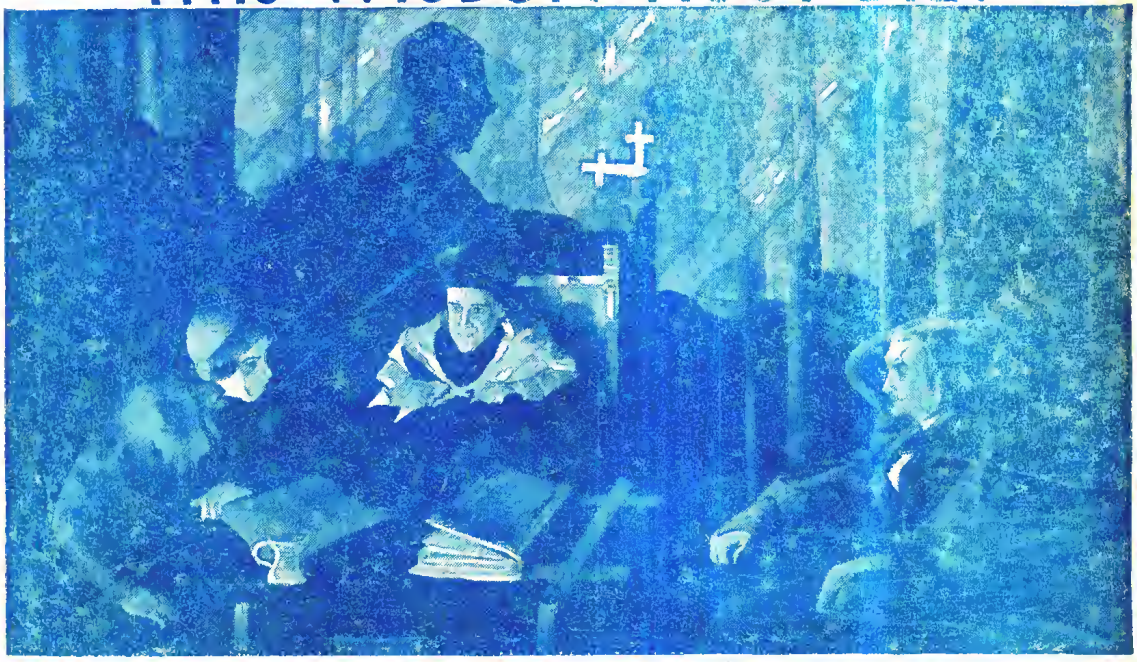
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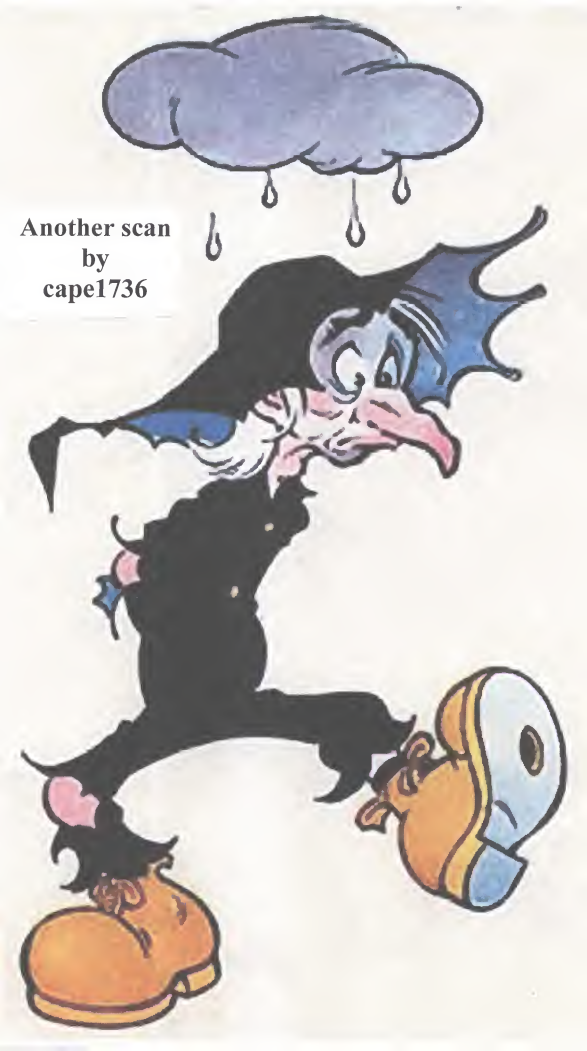


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